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Lilith

INDEPENDENT, JEWISH & FRANKLY FEMINIST

Out of the closet & under the *chuppah*

Attention Jewish women: Who cleans your house?

Disappointed in zippers (in Lower Manhattan)

VOLUME 31, NO. 2
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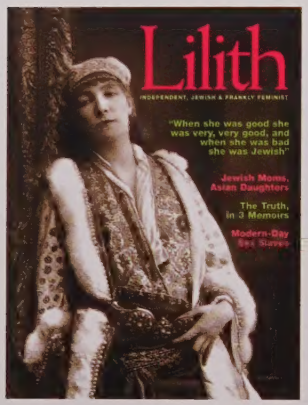
Lilith *Back Issues*

independent, Jewish and **frankly** feminist


Lilith
INDEPENDENT, JEWISH & FRANKLY FEMINIST
"When she was good she was very, very good, and when she was bad she was Jewish"
Jewish Moms, Asian Daughters
The Truth, in 3 Memoirs
Modern-Day Sex Slaves

Lilith
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Intermarried and Still Jewish
Jewish and Muslim women
Steam heat in Tangier
Analyzing our inner JAPs
Our hair, our shoes, our attitudes

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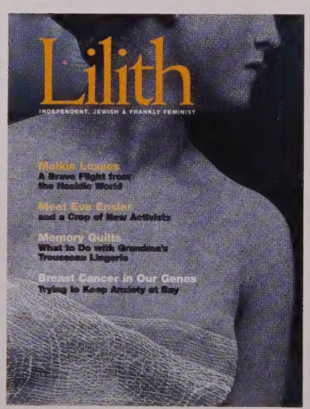
Autism moms
Jewish women's taboo
How to bring back the power of conversation
Southern comfort
A bubbe in the coal mines of Kentucky
That other V word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What to Do with Grandma's Trousseau Lingerie
Breast Cancer in Our Genes
Trying to Keep Anxiety at Bay

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"We were all strangers..."
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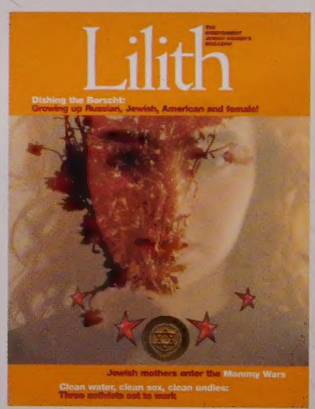
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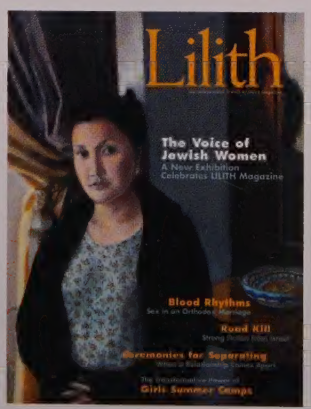

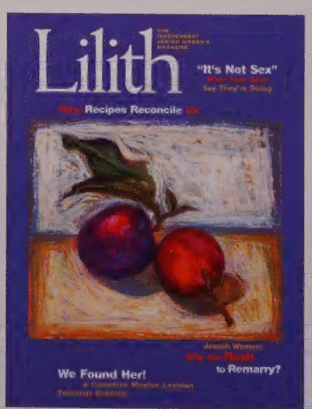

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—from *The Alphabet of Ben Sira*, 23a-b

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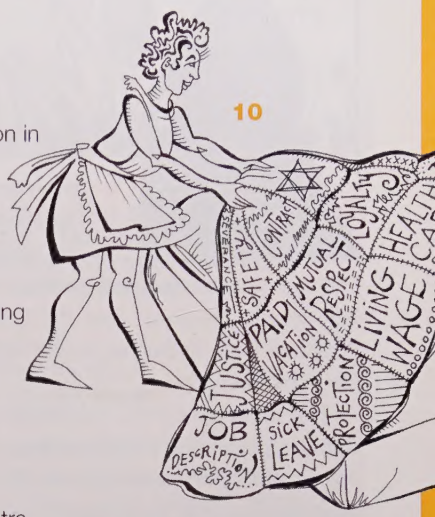

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Cover: © Rebecca Weiss Photography, www.rebeccaweiss.com

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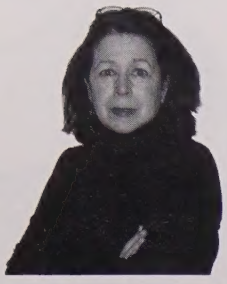


I'm trying to feel positive. South Dakota women have succeeded in getting more than enough signatures to put that state's nefarious abortion ban on hold—at least until November's elections. And the U.S. Senate has refused to let President Bush outlaw same-sex marriages via an amendment to the Constitution.

But these have been breathtakingly awful challenges to our rights, representing a deep intolerance for diversity and a lack of respect for other people's lives. In the wake of the news, I've been mulling over a conversation reported to me. When a Lilith subscriber told a friend about a powerful article she'd read in a previous issue, her buddy—who'd never seen a copy of the magazine—responded: "Lilith? That lesbian rag?" "Lesbian" is the last curse standing, obviously considered to be the most powerful insult in the sexist arsenal, the trope trotted out to discredit women activists (along with the words "shrill" and "strident"—never used to describe men), even when the subject at hand has nothing to do with sexuality or sexual identity. And when we do cover gay issues in Jewish life—like lesbian weddings, which we have written about for 20 years or so, along with the huge range of other subjects our reporters and essayists write about—the mention of the L word seems to take up all the oxygen in the room.

Lilith is not alone in attracting these insults. A prominent woman rabbi recounted to me recently that after her support for gay rights became known, her husband was told by a bystander that "those" leading women rabbis are "all a bunch of lesbians." Her husband's reply? "Thanks so much for letting me know. I've been sleeping with one of them for years, and I'm going right home to tell our sons that their mother is a lesbian." Rapid-fire repartee aside, the bias reeks. Prejudice persists in the attempt to discredit rights' advocates by suggesting that they are homosexual, with the corollary assumption that gay is bad.

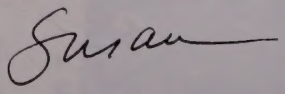
The cover story in the issue of Lilith you're holding in your hands is not overtly about politics. At least not the kind of public politics we think of when we discuss amendments to the Constitution. This story is about the struggle of one woman to accept her identity as a lesbian. She wants to be true to herself and to her beloved, and at the same time to stay connected to her loving family. But the personal is, as we know, political, and has important implications for capital-P politics. At least Jewish politics. The two women on the cover met in an Orthodox day school. They are no strangers to Jewish tradition. And their story recalls the statements made by the pioneering women activists of the early 1970s, who pressed Conservative Judaism to count women in the minyan and allow women to be called to the Torah. We take for granted that such egalitarian opportunities for worship exist now, but the women who pressed for these changes—thrillingly radical at the time, utterly normative today—were viewed as rabble-rousing interlopers, not, as they announced themselves to be, as the products of the movement itself, its schools and its camps. "We are your daughters," one of them said at the time. Similarly, the seemingly transgressive act of creating a ceremony steeped in Jewish themes and language to sanctify a union that traditional Judaism has not recognized, comes from women who are the daughters, literally and figuratively, of Modern Orthodoxy.

The two women on the cover have a lot to teach us not only about themselves and the process by which their relationship to one another and to their families evolved, but also about how their communities (and that means the rest of us) react. Gay and lesbian couples are too often still—let's face it—a kind of freak show at Jewish occasions, at a synagogue kiddush, or a wedding dance. The common question this couple heard when they came out was "How can someone so pretty be a lesbian?"

The rabbinic organization of the Conservative movement says that it will consider later this year its position on gay marriage and the ordination of openly homosexual rabbis and cantors. What the outcome of the deliberation will be is anybody's guess right now, but this memoir of identity crisis, with its palpable yearning to reconcile being a lesbian with being a Jew—familiar in its rhythms for those who remember the earlier struggles to bring Judaism and feminism into a closer alignment—will, we hope, humanize the issue for the Conservative rabbinical decisors.

Politics today—small p and capital P

I wrote in the introduction to my 1984 book *Jewish and Female* that one of its goals was to bring the "two poles of Judaism and feminism" together. Now, the polar tugs have dissipated; I find myself speaking often of how feminism and Judaism feel very consonant, both devoted to *tikkun olam*, making the world a better place. As you'll read, for gay Jews melding the two aspects of their identity, the poles are moving into closer alignment too.



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LONG AGO IN EDEN the SNAKE talks turkey to EVE
LOOK, YOU STAY HERE AND YOU'LL BE A SECOND CLASS - CITIZEN FOREVER. YOU LEAVE EDEN, AND YOU HAVE TO WAIT MAYBE 2, 3 THOUSAND YEARS AT THE MOST, FOR A SQUARE DEAL.
5.25
IT'S TEMPTING.
I'M STAYING HERE.
Nicole Hollander

THE SUPPORT FOR LILITH THIS QUARTER INCLUDES SPECIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO OUR EDITOR'S NEW DISCRETIONARY FUND CREATED BY BOARD MEMBER BARBARA DOBKIN IN HONOR SUSAN WEIDMAN SCHNEIDER'S 60TH BIRTHDAY.

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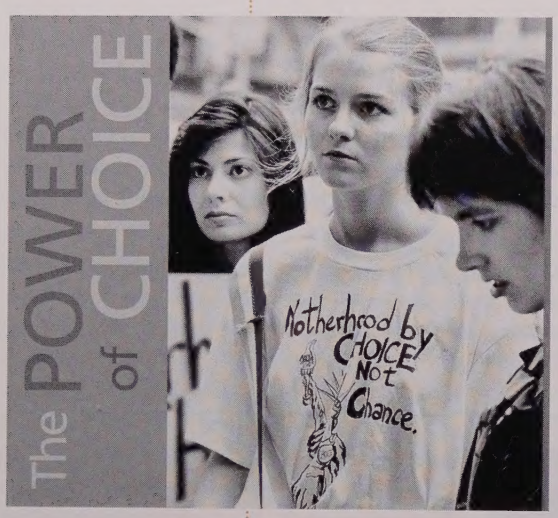
CORRECTION: Because of an editing error, in the article "Jewish Moms, Asian Daughters" by Merri Rosenberg (spring 2006) the impression may have been given that Hillel discriminates against Asian Jewish students. This is of course not the case. The original quote, from Dr. Patricia Lin, stated that "When they [i.e., Asian daughters] are not with their parents, they're seen as Asian....When they walk in with a Caucasian non-Jew, the non-Jew is thought to be the Jew."

Traditionally, the voice of the Jewish woman was not to be heard in public, lest it arouse men. **No more.** These pages are for news about Jewish women, **in our own strong voices.**

Motherhood by Choice, Not Chance

Oscar-nominated filmmaker **Dorothy Fadiman** has directed and narrated a riveting short documentary about legislative threats to abortion and what it's like for women to be without access to comprehensive reproductive health services. "Motherhood by Choice" opens with Fadiman recounting her own illegal, back-alley, pre-*Roe v. Wade* abortion. Blindfolded and taken to an unknown location, the filmmaker describes the horrific surgery and then reminds viewers that "when abortion was illegal thousands of women died." Nurses who worked in hospitals and treated women suffering from infections, as well as a doctor who performed illegal procedures and a minister who counseled women through the underground Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion, offer their accounts of these bad old days.



But it's when the film moves into the present and addresses current threats—the 350 laws restricting reproductive rights that have been imposed in the U.S. in the past decade—that it becomes especially powerful. Zeroing in on parental notification, the curtailment of Medicaid funding, and restrictions on when an abortion can take place, "Motherhood by Choice" describes the risks that women continue to take in order to end unwanted pregnancies. A teen counselor speaks of women using bleach douches and knitting needles—today—and details the obvious danger such desperate actions pose.

And lest one think these measures are rare, an Alabama clinician reminds us that "Restrictions today drive some women to illegal providers or home remedies. There is still a lot of that going on in Alabama."

Fadiman concurs. "The desperation level is already here for young women and poor women." While the film will likely inspire and activate everyone who sees it, it also provides would-be organizers with a number of tools to help them get started. A roster of resources, including pro-choice websites and an information booklet, are included.

—*Eleanor J. Bader*

Perfect for a youth group or class, this 27-minute documentary, available in both English and Spanish, was produced by The Power of Choice Project. One to nine copies, $5.00 each; 10-99, $3.50 each; 100-499 $3.00 each.

The Power of Choice Project
P.O. Box 1414
Menlo Park, CA 94026
www.thepowerofchoice.net

Which dressing do you want?
Wait, I have to ask Bill Napoli.
Who's that?
He's a senator in South Dakota who believes women can't make our own decisions. So whenever I'm faced with one, I call him at work: 605-348-7373.
And if he's not there, I try him at home: 605-341-2370.
Hello Bill? Roasted pepper vinegarette or honey mustard?

Cartoon by ***Stephanie McMillan****, widely circulated on the Internet.*

A Rebirth In Amsterdam

Amsterdam's Uilenburger Synagogue is set back from the street, behind a gate and a cobblestone courtyard. At the entrance to the synagogue, a banner painted with a bright rainbow reads *Iedereen welkom*. Everyone is welcome.

This is the new home of Beit HaChidush, House of Rebirth, Amsterdam's newest Jewish congregation. **Wanya Kruyer**, an Amsterdam visual artist and Beit HaChidush's co-founder, says of the Uilenburger, "After the war it was an empty building, symbolic for destruction. No more Jews, a synagogue and *simcha* place without *bima*, chairs, just empty." That the House of Rebirth is celebrating the Jewish holidays here is not lost on anyone.

Ten years ago, Beit HaChidush began as an informal gathering in borrowed space. One Shabbat per month, participants took turns leading services out of a prayerbook that Kruyer and some friends had photocopied. Many attending didn't know Hebrew and weren't familiar with Jewish traditions. Some hadn't even known they were Jewish. Kruyer says Dutch Holocaust survivors tended either to insulate themselves within Holland's observant Jewish community or abandon Judaism entirely. "Most people, I think even today, would say that there's no real Jewish life [in Europe] anymore," says Beit HaChidush's rabbi, **Elisa Klapheck**. "We are all children of survivors....[It] is very hard to have a relationship with God when your parents have been to Auschwitz." But little by little, the visionaries among the children of survivors began to rebuild. "People like Wanya and me started to say no—Jewish life *is* possible," says Klapheck. "We have to step out of the shadow [of the Shoa, the Holocaust] and build up something new." Beit HaChidush was born of that vision.

A feminist scholar and longtime leader of the Jewish community in her hometown of Berlin, Klapheck joined Beit HaChidush as its first rabbi, in May of 2005. Last summer the congregation hosted the first of what it hopes will become an annual Queer Shabbaton. Under the congregation's *chuppah,* Klapheck performed the Netherlands' first interfaith wedding. "Judaism has to be joyful," says Klapheck, and she says that one of the congregation's goals is "to make a way back to Judaism which works."

"We have looked westwards for inspiration," drawing from "the intellectual/spiritual Reconstructionists or Jewish feminism in the U.S.," co-founder Kruyer explained to the artist commissioned to design Beit HaChidush's new ark and Torah ornaments. At the same time, she said, "we see ourselves strongly as part of the European Jewish reality....This has consequences for our *mishkan*, our *Aron HaKodesh*. Should it face east as the tradition tells us, or west as well? Or, maybe to all four directions, to emphasize the many diasporas, the many centers, of contemporary Jewish life."

—Beth Schwartzapfel

This summer a Queer Shabbaton Amsterdam will take place in this synagogue from August 4-6. www.queershabbaton.org

"Just leave me alone, if you don't want me to **stop trusting you for good."**

*—**Anne Frank** to her father, in a letter recently discovered and put on display in the Amsterdam Historical Museum.*

Libraries Are Very Jewish

In his famous routine, the late comedian **Lenny Bruce** would tick off items he considered inherently Jewish and non-Jewish. Trailer parks, the Marine corps and white bread were *goyish*; pumpernickel bread, macaroons and black cherry soda were Jewish. Libraries, I submit, are inherently Jewish.

The Jewish people's reverence for the written word is legendary. Jews were the first known society to ground their civilization on a book.

Ironically, the public library—that most secular of institutions—has replaced the Torah as a major source of Jewish knowledge. I—and others, I suspect—head to the public library clutching the titles of Jewish books recommended in Lilith's reviews. From the shelves of my local library I learned how to survive my daughter's bat mitzvah and how to prepare my husband for conversion to Judaism. No wonder Nextbook, a national Jewish initiative to increase Jewish literacy, chose the library as its venue to reach Jews. As much as the Jewish community center or synagogue, the library is the place where Jews gather to learn about their own religion.

Each 5" tall, hard plastic Librarian Action Figure is modeled after ***Nancy Pearl****, a real-life librarian in the Seattle area. Press the button on her back and her arm will move with amazing "shushing action!" Comes with a tiny plastic replica of her most recent book,* Book Lust, *and a stack of random literature. The card features a brief history of libraries on the back as well as a realistic check-out card in a classic library sleeve along with two bookmarks and a Nancy Pearl trading card!*

As if receiving written wisdom personally throughout the generations were not enough—*Dayenu*—Jews go even one step further by talking about reading. Discussing—and arguing about— written texts has a long history among Jews. The longest lasting book club in the world is Torah study. Since about 200 C.E. and continuing today, readers have been gathering to discuss the same book. Torah study is traditionally taught in pairs so the text can be "wrestled with" from the group, as well as individual perspective. Indeed, the combination of reading and discussing is so central to Judaism, I would argue that book discussion groups deserve inclusion in Lenny Bruce's "inherently Jewish" list.

Likewise, book discussions—both formal programs and spontaneous conversations—are encouraged and supported by libraries.

It is perhaps no coincidence that One Book, One Community—a secular version of Torah study—was originally conceived by **Nancy Pearl**, a Jewish woman. Hers was but one of a string of innovations by Jews in the field of library science. In the 1920's librarian **Fanny Goldstein**, dubbed "one of the best liked Jewesses in New England," founded Children's Book Week, along with National Jewish Book Week and the Jewish Book Council. Jewish women, including volunteers from sisterhoods of Reform and Conservative Judaism, were instrumental in starting talking book services for the blind.

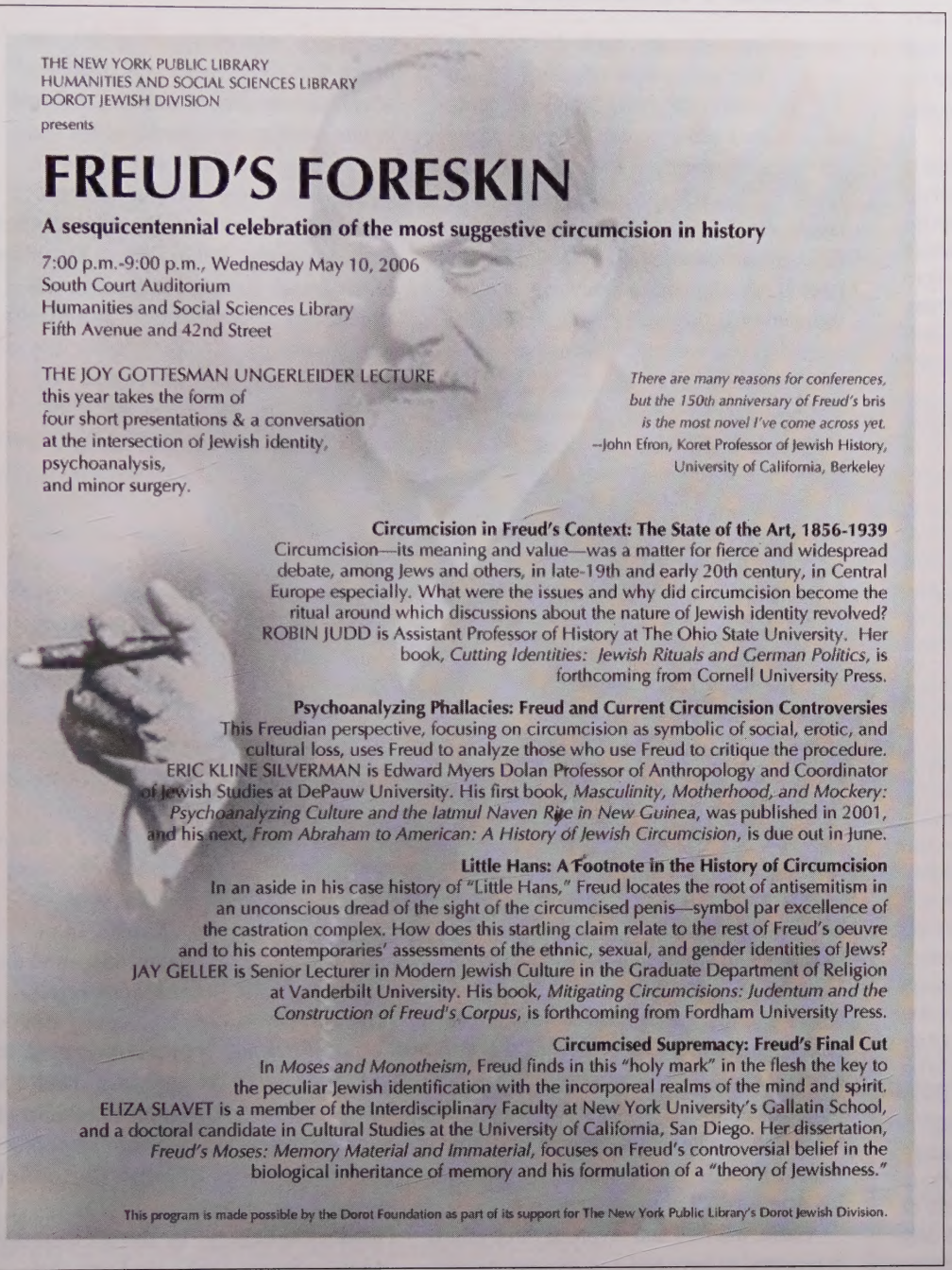
Golda Meir was one of the most famous Jewish women librarians. Before becoming Prime Minister of Israel, she worked in a public library. Today many prominent library leaders are Jewish. The late library science professor and political activist **Miriam Gutman Braverman** championed the cause of racial equality and helped found the Langston Hughes Library and Cultural Center. A Jewish woman, **Judith Krug**, directs the major library organization that battles censorship. When asked if being Jewish was a factor in her chosen profession, she said, "Not consciously, but the values I hold dear made me ideal for this job." And from whence did she develop these values? "From my mother—a Jewish mother, of course."

Whatever the exact number, it is obvious that at less than 3% of the U.S. population, Jews are over-represented within librarianship. Perhaps it is no coincidence, then, that a Jewish woman was chosen as the model for the librarian action figure.

Naturally, the doll comes equipped with a book in one hand. Given the numbers and influence of Jews in the profession, perhaps she should also be sold with some Jewishly-identifiable item. Out of deference to Lenny Bruce, maybe she should be equipped with a macaroon or a loaf of pumpernickel. Or better yet, why not give her a bowl of chicken soup—low-fat, even. I know just where to find a recipe…in the library, of course.

—Nancy Kalikow Maxwell

We Thought This Was Too Good to Miss!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presents
FREUD'S FORESKIN
A sesquicentennial celebration of the most suggestive circumcision in history
7:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m., Wednesday May 10, 2006
South Court Auditorium
Humanities and Social Sciences Library
Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street
THE JOY GOTTESMAN UNGERLEIDER LECTURE
this year takes the form of
four short presentations & a conversation
at the intersection of Jewish identity,
psychoanalysis,
and minor surgery.
There are many reasons for conferences, but the 150th anniversary of Freud's bris is the most novel I've come across yet.
--John Efron, Koret Professor of Jewish History, University of California, Berkeley
Circumcision in Freud's Context: The State of the Art, 1856-1939
Circumcision—its meaning and value—was a matter for fierce and widespread debate, among Jews and others, in late-19th and early 20th century, in Central Europe especially. What were the issues and why did circumcision become the ritual around which discussions about the nature of Jewish identity revolved?
ROBIN JUDD is Assistant Professor of History at The Ohio State University. Her book, Cutting Identities: Jewish Rituals and German Politics, is forthcoming from Cornell University Press.
Psychoanalyzing Phallacies: Freud and Current Circumcision Controversies
This Freudian perspective, focusing on circumcision as symbolic of social, erotic, and cultural loss, uses Freud to analyze those who use Freud to critique the procedure.
ERIC KLINE SILVERMAN is Edward Myers Dolan Professor of Anthropology and Coordinator of Jewish Studies at DePauw University. His first book, Masculinity, Motherhood, and Mockery: Psychoanalyzing Culture and the latmul Naven Rite in New Guinea, was published in 2001, and his next, From Abraham to American: A History of Jewish Circumcision, is due out in June.
Little Hans: A Footnote in the History of Circumcision
In an aside in his case history of "Little Hans," Freud locates the root of antisemitism in an unconscious dread of the sight of the circumcised penis—symbol par excellence of the castration complex. How does this startling claim relate to the rest of Freud's oeuvre and to his contemporaries' assessments of the ethnic, sexual, and gender identities of Jews?
JAY GELLER is Senior Lecturer in Modern Jewish Culture in the Graduate Department of Religion at Vanderbilt University. His book, Mitigating Circumcisions: Judentum and the Construction of Freud's Corpus, is forthcoming from Fordham University Press.
Circumcised Supremacy: Freud's Final Cut
In Moses and Monotheism, Freud finds in this "holy mark" in the flesh the key to the peculiar Jewish identification with the incorporeal realms of the mind and spirit.
ELIZA SLAVET is a member of the Interdisciplinary Faculty at New York University's Gallatin School, and a doctoral candidate in Cultural Studies at the University of California, San Diego. Her dissertation, Freud's Moses: Memory Material and Immaterial, focuses on Freud's controversial belief in the biological inheritance of memory and his formulation of a "theory of Jewishness."
This program is made possible by the Dorot Foundation as part of its support for The New York Public Library's Dorot Jewish Division.

A conference to mark the 150th anniversary of Freud's bris!

"The more we say this is impossible,
the more impossible we will make it."

—***Colette Avital**, deputy speaker of Israel's Parliament, the Knesset, urging that peace talks between Israel and Hamas continue despite the deep political disagreements on both sides, and that women play a stronger role in talks between Israelis and Palestinians. Her comments of April 5, 2006, were widely reported, including in Ha'aretz and Women's E-News.*

Here is a sampling of women's reactions both to Gafni's dismissal and to the regret expressed by his former colleagues:

"Does anyone doubt that if Rabbi Mordechai Gafni's victims had been boys or men, the response by his rabbinic colleagues would have been radically different—from the beginning? **This case, then, is about not only ignorance and hubris, but also misogyny."**

—Shulamith Magnus, in The Forward (5/26/06)

"Years ago, when he admitted to having sexual relations with young teens, he never recognized that these young women were traumatized for life. **They were changed forever, and he does not acknowledge this."**

—Marcia Cohn Spiegel, in a communiqué to Lilith

"**Would our leaders apply these same exacting standards** [of *lashon hara*] **if the commodity in question were Jewish money and not Jewish bodies and souls?** Would they hire a bookkeeper if they received numerous warnings —from varied, unrelated sources —that, although nothing was ever proven, the bookkeeper left all previous positions abruptly, changing his name and location, always under deep suspicion of embezzlement?... No one is asking these leaders to publicly vilify a rabbi who is dogged by persistent reports of sexual impropriety. We are only asking that they exercise the same caution with our spiritually thirsty young women and men that they would with their tax-free dollars. ...You cannot claim to be Gafni's victims when you have, in fact, been his enablers."

—Judy Klitsner, in The Jewish Week (6/02/06)

Charismatic Rabbi Fired for His Sexual Predations

After accusations of sexual misconduct with young female students and other women for more than 25 years, **Mordechai Gafni**, 46, a charismatic rabbi and teacher associated with the Jewish Renewal movement, has been fired from his leadership role on the faculty of Bayit Chadash, a study center he co-founded in Tel Aviv. Gafni, an American, moved to Israel about 15 years ago and changed his name from Winiarz to divert attention away from earlier allegations, according to news reports. In emails sent by the board of the study center, Lilith was told that Gafni was dismissed after four women—students and employees—came forward and gave sworn testimony before an Israeli lawyer, recounting Gafni's exploitation of the relationship between a spiritual leader and his congregants or students. Israeli police have not yet taken action against Gafni, who has left Israel for the United States in the wake of his dismissal. "I am sick," he says.

Cover of Maariv / Sofshavua (Friday Weekend Magazine)—October 15, 2004. Photograph by Arik Soltan, illustrating "Ways of Pleasantness," an article by Sherri Makover-Balikov.

Gafni, married and divorced three times, is reported to have had a years-long pattern of promising women he counseled that he would marry them if they had sex with him, swearing each woman to "eternal and absolute silence." Earlier allegations included that as a 19-year-old youth leader he had had a sexual relationship with at least one 13-year-old girl, saying later that she was "13, going on 35."

When **Gary Rosenblatt** reported in 2004, in New York's Jewish Week newspaper, that Gafni had a long history of sexual misconduct, then being reported in the Israeli press as well, rabbis male and female, traditional and otherwise, came passionately to Gafni's defense. Rabbi **Saul Berman**, respected Modern Orthodox leader, Rabbi **Tirzah Firestone** of the Jewish Renewal movement and ethicist and author **Joseph Telushkin** were among those who wrote the Jewish Week that they had investigated and found the past allegations "totally unconvincing." Those defenders and others have, since the firing in May, sprung up to announce that they were wrong—that they, too, had been manipulated by Gafni. Several have said how difficult it is to strike a balance between avoiding *lashon hara*—speaking ill of someone—and the need to protect a community from predators.

Meanwhile, from substantiated accounts of sexual exploitation by other charismatic rabbis (**Shlomo Carlebach** among them, as reported in "The Paradoxical Legacy" by **Sarah Blustain** in Lilith, Spring 1998), we know that wounds from the betrayal by a spiritual leader remain with the victims for years. But unlike Lilith's coverage of the Carlebach misconduct, where the victims spoke in their own words, much of the focus of current reporting has been on the defenders, the retractors and the accused himself.

—Susan Weidman Schneider

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"**Pharmacists are lying to patients** about whether their pharmacies are currently stocking **emergency contraceptives.**"

—***Hannah Rosenthal***, *Executive Director of Chicago Foundation for Women, advocating that the State of Illinois require pharmacies to post signs by their counters that inform patients of their rights to access contraceptives and how to file complaints.*

"It's 37 years since I first became a mother, and what passes for public discussion about that role still resembles a food fight more than breakfast in bed.

"**I've been an embedded correspondent in the mommy wars** between stay-at-home and go-to-work mothers for at least 20 of those years. My daughter is now a mother, and the combat has engaged a second generation, as if it were something new.

"In real life, the mothers I have known commuted back and forth across those battle lines without even passing a checkpoint. Some had husbands who lost their jobs. Others just lost their husbands. Kids entered the nest and left the nest. One family needed healthcare benefits. Another had a sick child at home. One woman couldn't take the stress of juggling, and another couldn't take the stress of bills. They performed the Improv that's called life."

—***Ellen Goodman*** *in the Boston Globe, May 12, 2006*

"Talk—particularly talk about personal topics—plays a larger and more complex role in girls' and women's social lives than in boys' and men's. **For girls and women, talk is the glue that holds a relationship together—and the explosive that can blow it apart.** That's why you can think you're having a perfectly amiable chat, then suddenly find yourself wounded by the shrapnel from an exploded conversation....

"A mother's gaze is like a magnifying glass held between the sun's rays and kindling. It concentrates the rays of imperfection on her daughter's yearning for approval. The result can be a conflagration—whoosh.

"This I knew: Because a mother's opinion matters so much, she has enormous power....**Daughters and mothers, I found, both overestimate the other's power—and underestimate their own.**"

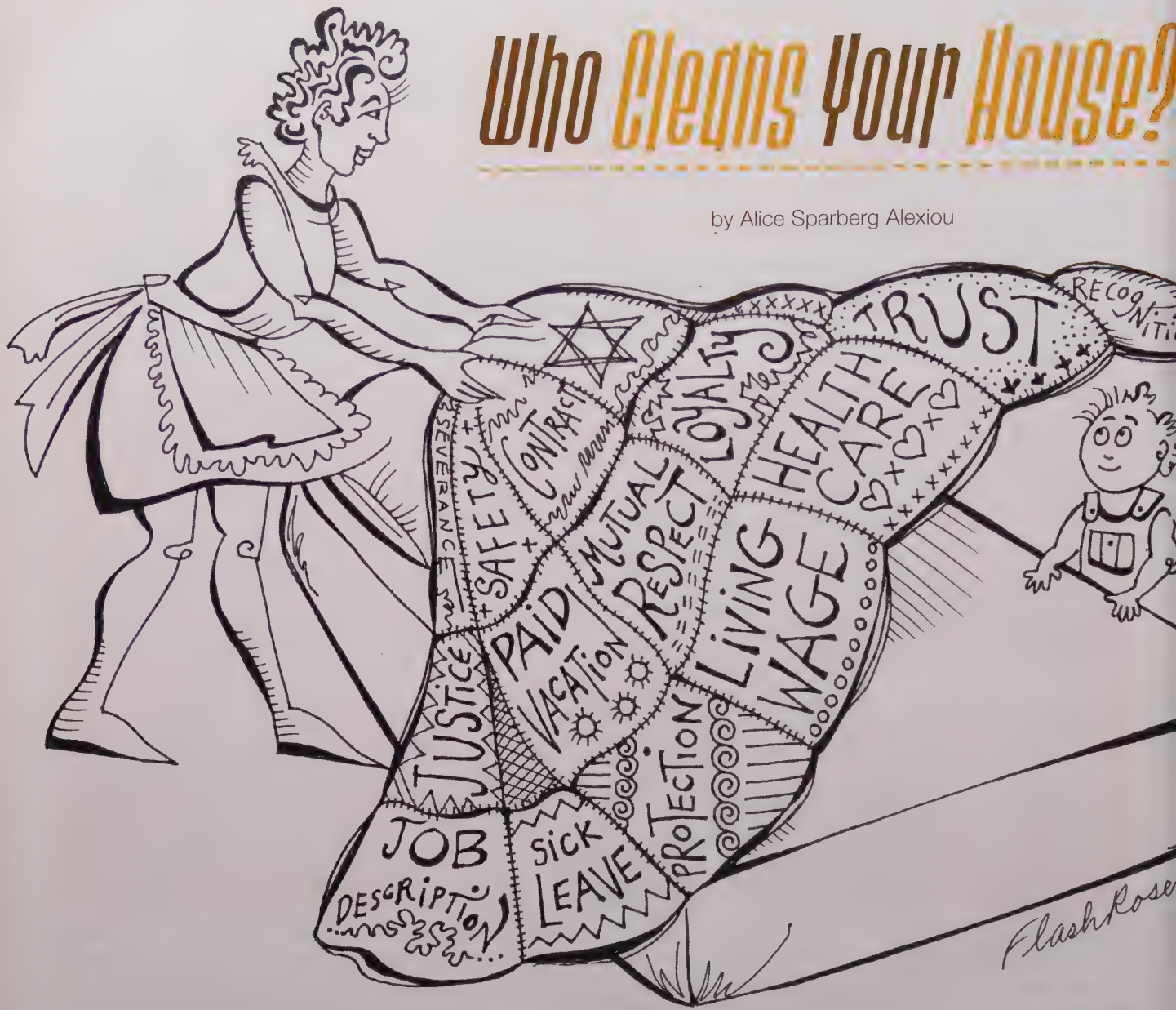
—***Deborah Tannen***, *in The Washington Post, January 22, 2006. She has a new book out:* You're Wearing That? Understanding Mothers and Daughters in Conversation.

"Rows of abandoned, **modest, multicolored cushions** remained on the benches marking the places of their absent owners. We took them home—orphans with little value except as a memorial to the generations of **Jewish women in synagogue balconies.**"

—*Fabric artist* ***Jane Trigere,*** *on rescuing artifacts from an abandoned synagogue in New York City*

Who Cleans Your House?

by Alice Sparberg Alexiou



It has been nearly 40 years since Philip Roth made us squirm and shrink back in anxious revulsion with his description of Mrs. Portnoy's sly and awful avoidance of her cleaning lady's germs. (Didn't she keep a separate plate for the tunafish she made her, and make sure to boil her cutlery afterward?)

The relationship between women who hire someone to clean the house and mind the kids—or the frail elders—is complicated by the sometimes conflicting desire both to treat an employee fairly and to meet one's own need for help. From Zoe Baird's tumble from grace over failure to pay Social Security for her household worker to the scandalous behaviors of the master and mistress of the house catalogued in The Nanny Diaries, a nervousness about this sometimes fraught relationship shivers like a hidden stream through the daily lives of women who employ others to do what was traditionally women's work: cleaning, cooking, child care.

In the 1970s, controversies over housework had to do with domestic discontents of a different sort: wages for housework; the monetary value of a stay-at-home wife and mother; negotiating who does the laundry or the dishes. One study of household roles done in England a decade or two ago revealed the clear gender-role distinctions around housework. When married men were asked "Who cleans the toilets in your house?" most of them answered, numbingly oblivious to how damning the answer was, "I don't know."

Today women's feelings about housework may still include a sense of the injustice that married women, even those employed outside the home, still do more of the work in the home than their husbands do. But we're also aware of a different injustice, and the responsibility we have—as Jews and as women—to treat fairly the women we employ to do "women's work" in our own homes.

—Susan Weidman Schneider

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"It's my schmutz. I should take care of it."

I am sitting in a Brooklyn diner, having breakfast with Marlene Champion, 61, a tall, striking woman from Barbados. Champion makes her living as a domestic worker, and right now she works as a nanny caring for a four-year-old girl in Brooklyn Heights. Champion is also an active member of Domestic Workers United, a Bronx-based organization fighting for domestic workers' rights. In the 16 years since she immigrated here, Champion has worked in several households, all Jewish. With the exception of one family which treated her badly, she says she's had good relations with all of them.

Champion felt especially close to a Dr. Steiner, whom she took care of for six years, until he died at 92 with Champion at his side. She was in charge of all his care—meals, laundry, cleaning. She accompanied him to all the family weddings. He had specialized in the study of tuberculosis, and he used to tell her stories about his work. Sometimes, he showed her his old slides. You'd make such a great doctor, or nurse, he used to tell her. Champion still keeps a picture of Dr. Steiner on her wall, and stays in close contact with his children.

After she finishes telling me her story, I say that my family had a housekeeper when I was growing up. I also say something that she probably already knows: that hiring domestic help is fairly common in Jewish households. And then I ask her what is special, if anything, about working for Jewish families.

She smiles. "We're of different races," she says. "But I think we have a lot in common."

When Jews hire people to do household jobs—anybody who cleans, cooks, does the laundry, cares for children or elderly parents—we are the ones who represent a privileged class, with the funds to hire help. Jews today are generally wealthier and better educated than most other Americans. But the widespread practice of having "help" goes all the way back to our grandmother's day, when even Jewish families in modest circumstances very often had cleaning ladies, perhaps because the wages for domestic work were so low that even working-class families could often afford this small luxury. ("It wasn't as if you were putting on airs," a Jewish woman in her seventies told me. "Having a cleaning lady was socially acceptable.") Yet even the term "cleaning lady" indicates the awkwardness employers feel in the presence of a rather un-American class system. We don't need to call the electrician the "electrical fix-it gentleman," after all.

Today, two-career households need housekeepers and nannies and cleaning ladies even more than the stereotypical clean-floor-obsessed housewives of a previous generation might have. Indeed, some of the backlash against the women's movement focuses on this issue; the gains of middle-class women during the last three decades, critics charge, were achieved through the exploitation of other, less fortunate women. And despite previous efforts to elevate the status of housecleaners—in the 1970s, feminist activists in concert with workers' groups stated that fair pay for a job responsibly done was no different if you were a housekeeper than if you were any other kind of laborer—those attempts to craft a more businesslike context for domestic work never really took hold.

Our relationship with the women who work in our homes is still inherently an unequal one. This fact makes many of us so uncomfort-

able that some Jewish women refuse to have household help even if they can afford it. Breena Kaplan, 65, is an artist on Long Island who has always done her own cleaning, "It's my *schmutz* [dirt], so I should take care of it," said Kaplan, a "red-diaper baby" who grew up in "the Co-ops," two Bronx apartment buildings populated in the 1940s and onward largely by left-wing Jews. Her father, who came from Russia a card-carrying Communist, made "a good living" in the textile business, and he insisted that Luba, his wife, have help in the house. Kaplan remembers Elizabeth, a tall black woman who smelled of starch and soap, standing over the sink, scrubbing the family's wash. But Elizabeth didn't last long, because Luba couldn't stand the humiliation she felt at a black woman coming into her home and slaving away for her in, of all places, the Co-ops.

Some Jewish women attempt to deal with the discomfort they feel at the imbalance of power between them and their domestic workers by reframing the relationship as a collaboration. Carla Singer, a film producer in New York City, employs Grace Walker (not her real name) as a twice-weekly housekeeper. Singer says she really only needs Walker one day a week, but, "this is *tikkun* [repair of the world]. I know where my extra money is going—to support Grace and her son. If I send it to a charity, I don't know where my money is going." Singer feels that the tikkun is mutual—Walker helped her out at a very difficult time, after Singer had just made a hugely dislocating transition, she said, moving to New York from Los Angeles with her teenage daughter. One day, as Walker was helping them settle into a new apartment, Singer, stressed-out, snapped at her. Walker shot back, "You know, Carla, we're partners in this."

"She was right," Singer said. "In a sense, she doesn't work *for* me."

Except that Walker *does* work for Singer. And it's time to talk openly about the relationship between Jewish women and "the help" (almost always female) we employ in the intimate settings of our own homes and families, especially in the context both of the global discussion of immigration laws and the more local desperation of working mothers juggling many needs. According to Domestic Workers United, virtually all domestic workers today (and "domestic workers" is the term they prefer) are immigrants, the vast majority of them undocumented, which makes it all too easy for employers to exploit them, wittingly or not. The good news is that there's movement to encourage Jews to treat those who work for us with fairness. Indeed, the Talmud enjoins us to treat those who work for us honestly, compassionately and with dignity.

A series of interviews with both Jewish employers and their domestic workers revealed that, happily, the mutual respect between Marlene Champion and the Steiner family is not unique. But I also heard awful stories about Jewish families who treat their domestic workers badly, ranging from subtle to not-so-subtle insults (recalling Philip Roth's cringe-inducing scene of Portnoy's mother and her treatment of the so-called "*schvartze*" in *Portnoy's Complaint*) and a real blindness to the basic needs of the employee, to allegations of physical and sexual abuse.

Some bosses, in flagrant disregard of Jewish teachings and basic consideration, don't pay their domestic workers on time. "Do not withhold the pay of your workers overnight," it says in Leviticus 19:13. ("I didn't get to the bank today.") Or, in a striking lack of empathy, some employers don't recognize the dire financial consequences to a day worker—counting on the next day's wages to pay the rent, or feed her kids—who gets a call the night before, announcing "I don't need you tomorrow."

"They're not like us."

Some employers mistreat their domestic workers in more subtle ways. Gayle Kirshenbaum, who is active in Jews for Economic and Racial Justice (JFREJ), a New York City-based grass-roots group with the stated goal of injecting a "progressive Jewish voice" into New York City politics, once remarked to a friend, also Jewish, how awful it must be for Caribbean domestic workers to have to leave their children back home with relatives. Her friend disagreed. "No, it doesn't bother them," the friend said. "They're not like us." Another woman spoke of her friend, a Holocaust survivor's daughter in her fifties, living in a New York suburb, who confessed to feeling gratified when she ordered around a non-Jewish Polish immigrant cleaning lady. The one family that Marlene Champion said did not treat her well consisted of two ill and elderly parents, whom Champion looked after for eight months, and their adult daughter who lived nearby. The problem, Champion said, was the daughter. She would buy only enough groceries for her parents; Champion was expected to get her own food. (Over and over again domestic workers complained about employers who do not provide food). When Champion lifted the father from his bed to his wheelchair—something she had been trained to do—the daughter, likening Champion to a man, would call her "Harry." And one day, when the daughter was visiting, Champion overheard a conversation between daughter and father. The father was telling his daughter how much he liked Champion, so much that he'd like to give her something. Maybe even some stock that he owned.

The daughter was furious. "Oh, no! They're just the help!" she screamed loudly. Champion, although in another room, could not help but hear. "Give it to your grandchildren!"

Money, of course, is a real issue. Many domestic workers are badly paid. According to Domestic Workers United, some day workers receive as little as two dollars an hour; some live-ins are paid 250 dollars *a month*. Domestic Workers United recommends a living wage of 14 dollars an hour. Even

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though labor laws technically protect all workers, documented or not, in reality the laws fail domestic workers. Domestics do not have the right to unionize, and most are undocumented immigrants, which makes them doubly vulnerable. These facts make it nearly impossible for them to demand such rights as health care, severance pay, paid vacation, sick days, notice of termination—all things that we would likely assume were due us if we were the employees ourselves. But how domestic workers fare depends entirely on the will, good or ill, of their employers.

Jeannie Prager spoke to Lilith about how these issues play out in her tightly-knit modern Orthodox community in a New Jersey suburb: "We are the people who seem to hire the most housekeepers. And we're doing a terrible job." Prager knows this, because over the years she'd gotten quite an earful, both from Victoria Smith (not her real name), her former housekeeper, and from Smith's schmoozing friends, who often hung out at the house.

Prager recently fired Smith, who'd been with her for 13 years, providing care to Prager's ailing nonagenarian mother for the last nine of them. "It was time for a change," Prager said. "She was always on the phone. Her friends who worked in the neighborhood often stopped by for a bite and a chat on their way home. It was all just too much, too much noise and commotion." Letting Smith go was a tough decision, though. "She was a godsend in many ways. And a 13-year relationship, with two women sharing one kitchen, becomes a very close friendship." When Prager finally got the words out, she gave Smith two days' notice and $5,000, six weeks' severance pay. Smith, also eligible for unemployment compensation, was furious. "I always held you up on a pedestal," Smith told her employer. "But my friends always warned me. And now I see that they were right, that you're just like all the rest." "The rest," of course, meant the rest *of the Jews.* Prager felt horrible. But despite Smith's anger, she and her family paid a shiva call when Prager's mother died shortly after the firing.

"I shouldn't have to pay."

It took Smith seven months to find a comparable job. Prager said she was the one to find it for her. (Smith declined several requests to speak with Lilith directly.) In the Prager household, Smith had two weeks off annually to start, increased to three weeks at her 10-year anniversary, five sick days, three personal days and "of course," said Prager, paid holidays. Prospective employers, responding to the ad Prager posted for Smith on the shul's website, kept telling her they'd never heard of a housekeeper getting paid vacation time.

Worried, Prager approached her rabbi with the idea of starting a discussion in the congregation about practices around hiring household help. "I feel that if some of these women [employers] could speak in a safe environment and say what bothers them, and likewise for their housekeepers, we would all benefit," she said. The rabbi said her idea was interesting, and that was the end of it.

In case you thought this was a new problem...

"You shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer, whether a fellow countryman or stranger in one of the communities of your land. You must pay him his wages on the same day, before the sun sets, for he is needy and urgently depends on it...."

(Deuteronomy 24: 14-15)

"Do not send him [the servant] away empty-handed. You shall give him a severance gift from your flocks, from your threshing floor, and from your wine cellar..."

(Deuteronomy 15: 13-14)

"When you come [as a worker] into your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat as many grapes as is your desire, to your fill, but you may not put any into a receptacle."

(Deuteronomy 23: 25-26)

Prager had nailed it, though her rabbi wasn't listening. But at least one rabbi is: Rabbi Ellen Lippmann of the Brooklyn congregation Kolot Chayeinu devoted last year's Rosh Hashanah sermon to employing domestic workers, not a usual High Holidays theme.

"On a night designated for thinking about doing right, it seems crucial that we Jews be thoughtful about and to the people who work in our homes," she said. And often, she added, we are not. "Not out of malice, but out of busy-ness and lack of thought." Lippmann cited the story of Sarah and Hagar, whom the infertile Sarah mistreats when Hagar conceives. According to the medieval commentator Ramban, Lippman says, "Sarah sinned when she did this and so did Abraham by letting it happen." She added: "When we hire someone to work in our homes, we must see that person as fully human, seen by God."

Lippmann, like Kirshenbaum, is active in JFREJ. Two years ago JFREJ embarked on a "Shalom Bayit" campaign in partnership with Domestic Workers United. JFREJ also hosts small group discussions in people's homes, the "living room project."

As part of the campaign, JFREJ members conduct discussions in synagogues about the just treatment of domestic

workers. Last year, for example, Kirshenbaum and two DWU members, Marlene Champion and Allison Julien, were invited to visit Temple Beth-El in Great Neck, an upscale New York suburb, for the congregation's Social Action Shabbat. The women spoke about domestic workers rights. JFREJ's membership is decidedly left-leaning. In their Shalom Bayit campaign, JFREJ is trying, says Kirshenbaum, "to broach the line between progressive and more traditional Jews," because it is clear "how deeply this issue resonates in the Jewish community" in both directions. Jews are employers, she said, and they also want to do right by their employees.

"Doing right" means putting your money where your mouth is. At the living room meetings JFREJ organizers talk about the specifics of treating domestic workers in a professional manner. Which means, for example, offering full-time employees a contract. The standard contract, based on a DWU model specifies, for example, what responsibilities the job does—and does not—entail, how many paid sick days and vacation days the employee is entitled to, what the rate of payment will be for overtime work, the medical care the employer agrees to pay for, such as checkups and ob-gyn exams, and what the food arrangement will be.

The document explaining the contract goes out of its way to assure employers that using a contract is good for them, too, leading to more loyalty from the employee, and an end to abrupt departures (there's a "must give notice" clause). But it may take a while to shift employers from the current more casual (and less fair, though less costly) model of doing business. The JFREJ-DWU presentation last year at Temple Beth-El of Great Neck, said social action committee chairwoman Alice Fornari, did not get much of a response. "The evening ends and then it's over," Fornari said. Other social-action subjects—stopping the genocide in Darfur, for example—get a significant response from the whole community, said Rabbi Rabbi Darcie Crystal, who organized the social action Shabbat with Fornari and supported the domestic workers issue. With domestic help it's a different matter. "It's a very risky topic for a social action Shabbat," Fornari told me. "People don't want it in their face." People, she said, would rather hear about, say, Israel. In other words, issues and places that are far away.

"I don't think most people care about the rights of domestic workers," Fornari said. "They don't feel it's a topic that's relevant to their lives, even though the women they hire are taking care of their homes and their children. People don't want to talk about it because they don't want to do anything about it." It is a topic dear to her, Fornari said, because of her involvement with each of the housekeepers she has employed over the years in her own home. She helped one, who came from Bolivia not knowing any English, to get into college; the woman is now a teacher. Extensive interviews reveal that many Jewish employers have tried similarly to improve the lives of their housekeepers; Fornari's behavior, like Prager's, is not an isolated phenomenon.

Fornari is determined to continue the conversation that she started at Temple Beth-El. She would love to see a "living room" session in Great Neck.

Fair Practices

Domestic Workers United (718-220-7391) suggests that a written contract between employees and fulltime household help will make life smoother for the employer and will "minimize misunderstandings by documenting agreements carefully and completely." In addition, the use of the contract is being pitched as a device for "promoting the provision of quality care for families and homes; workers who feel recognized and respected will do their job better."

The items in the model "standard contract" include a list of work responsibilities, number of children to be cared for (if any), rate of pay per week and amount per hour for more than a 40-hour week (live out) or 44 hour week (live in), plus:

- Day of the week and time of day when the wages will be paid
- A pledge by the employer to provide a letter of reference at the end of every year of employment
- Agreement on paid civic holidays, personal days and religious holidays
- Provision for using telephone, kitchen and bathroom
- A suggested one month's unpaid maternity leave

Kirshenbaum described hosting such a meeting at a home in Park Slope, Brooklyn, a neighborhood where a majority of the women pushing strollers on the streets look to be other than the babies' mothers. "There were perhaps 11 people there. We raised issues like the fact that if you go on vacation, you need to pay your domestic worker. And people said, but no, if I'm going away, I shouldn't have to pay."

"But then," Kirshenbaum continued, "I could see people shifting categories, for the first time. It was like light bulbs going on. These women had thought of their domestic workers as casual baby sitters, not as women who were counting on this salary to pay their own household bills. And now, they were suddenly realizing, 'We are employers and they are our employees, and of course *I* get sick leave, so why shouldn't they?'"

"There is no shame in hiring someone to work for us," Kirshenbaum said. "The only shame is in not treating them well." ●

Alice Sparberg Alexiou is a contributing editor at LILITH and the author of *Jane Jacobs: Urban Visionary* (Rutgers University Press, 2006).

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One Candle for Sophie

a short story by Evelyn Krieger

"Are you Jewish?" a young woman asks as Mom and I step into the summer heat outside Kroger's market.

"Yeah. I am," I reply, an unfamiliar pride landing in my chest.

The woman smiles, and holds up a cellophane bag. "Would you like some Shabbat candles?"

"Sure," I say, taking the bag. I notice her ankle-length denim skirt and a long-sleeved shirt. "Thanks."

"Candle lighting is at 8:17 tonight," she says, as if announcing the arrival of an eclipse.

"Let's go, Jess," Mom says, pushing her shopping cart into the cross walk.

When we get to our van, Mom asks, "Why did you tell her you were Jewish?"

"Aren't I?"

"First of all, it's none of her business. Second of all, you're only half."

I shrug. "Half is better than nothing."

I toss the candle bag on the front seat, and then help Mom load the groceries into the trunk. "How come we never light Sabbath candles?"

"We're not religious."

"Right."

On the ride home, I open the candle bag and read the brochure aloud. "Light up the world! Bring peace and harmony into your home. Connect with generations of Jewish women." I glance at Mom. "Sounds pretty cool."

"My grandmother used to do that," she says.

I study the two candle holders. "I think I'll light one for Sophie."

My sister's name hangs in the air.

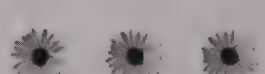
My mother says nothing.

During the day, I keep thinking that the young woman outside the supermarket might be a sign. She had a kind of holy aura, but I didn't say this to Mom. I wondered why the woman wanted me to light the Sabbath candles.

Mom said she probably wanted money, or for us to join her temple. I can't remember the last time someone asked me if I was Jewish, but it felt good to be reminded of this. Mom is Jewish, but to her it's more like a fact, like checking the "Caucasian" box. My Dad was brought up Quaker. He took me to a Friends meeting once. I almost died of boredom trying to sit quietly for forty-five minutes. That's just not my style. I love to talk, and debate and ask questions.

Later in the evening, I dash home after softball practice. There are just ten minutes left until candle-lighting. The brochure says you can light the candles up to an hour and a half before sundown, but definitely not afterwards. I don't know why, but I figure I might as well do it right my first time. I find a box of matches from Zorro's Eatery. I set the candles sticks on our dining room table. I think about calling Mom to join me, but I hear her and Dad watching TV in the family room, and I change my mind.

The brochure says it's customary to put some coins in a charity box before lighting the candles. I don't think we have one in our house, so I skip this step. I light my candle, then Sophie's. I circle my hands three times around the flames. Then I read the Hebrew pronunciation in English. *Baruch atah adonay elohainu…*I know I've heard these magic words somewhere before. *"Asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav, vitzivanu l'hadlick ner shel shabbos"* I cover my eyes, like the girl on the front of the brochure. I let myself feel the peace coming in. Then, in my mind, I see Sophie blowing out her birthday candles.



In the middle of the night, I awake choking. I can't get the air into me. I spring up in my bed, force my eyes open, until my throat relaxes again. Nightmare number 17. I wait for my beating heart to calm down, and then I stand up into the patch of yellow cast from my seashell night light. I feel a gentle force guiding me outside my room, down the hall, to Sophie's room. I place my hand on the cold doorknob and wait. I listen, making sure my parents are not awake. Then slowly, I open the door.

The warm air inside her bedroom surprises me. The window air-conditioner is silent. *Of course.* I sit down on Sophie's canopy bed. My eyes adjust to the darkness. I see the outline of giant panda bear and her Victorian doll house. She had always wanted me to play doll house with her, but that pretending stuff had already grown out of me. Sophie could be such a girly-girl at times, but then, put a bat and ball in her hand

and watch out. She loved to be outdoors more than anything. And she was fearless. I suppose that's one of the reasons she is not sleeping in her bed right now.

"Sophie," I whisper into the darkness. "Are you there? Did you see the candle I lit for you tonight? I miss you."

I make myself wait in the silence until I am sleepy again. I do not cry.

Kroger's supermarket is one of the few places Mom goes to these days. This is at least better than staying in bed all day. I ask her to buy me a box of candles next time she's at the store. "The white Sabbath ones, like that woman gave us."

My mother looks at me funny. "So you're planning to light them every week?"

"I'll give it a try. Whatever."

The candle-lighting brochure says that the Shabbat candles, and the women who light them, possess awesome power. Our silent prayers have spiritual energy that can affect the world. I like this idea, and when I light the candles again at 8:11 on Friday night, I imagine my words floating into another dimension, illuminating the souls of Jewish women and girls who can no longer see the light.

"Why did you tell her you were Jewish?"

My dad asks about the candles while we eat breakfast Saturday morning. He listens as I explain the little I know about welcoming the Jewish Sabbath and bringing peace into the world. He tells me that Quakers believe we are all children of the Light. The Light is implanted within us from God and it is up to us to seek it out.

"Seeking peace is the cornerstone of the faith," he says softly.

I have already absorbed this from childhood and from hearing my father's reaction to the war.

"I'd like to know more about being Jewish," I tell my father.

"All religions have spiritual truths."

I smile at him. "Do you think there are any Jewish Quakers?"

"Who knows? Maybe you'll be the first."

I take another blueberry muffin. "Sophie loved these."

"Yes. She did. Remember her blueberry tooth?"

I laugh thinking about her dangling front tooth that hung on for dear life, turning pink, then blue, until it finally fell out.

Our smiles fade and we sip our tea. Once again, silence wraps around us. My father has always said that we can find God in the silence. I don't know if Jews believe this too, but I can only take so much of silence, before I have to fill the empty space with words, or sometimes, tears. My mother's silence is a different kind. She won't let me inside it. I do not believe she is seeking God. I think she is drowning in an ocean of darkness.

Sophie's funeral was on the most gorgeous May morning. The sky was an electric blue and the flower arrangements around her gravesite—roses, lilies, lilacs, tulips, and daffodils—were glowing. The warm air smelled of grass and earth and flowers. It seemed impossible that this heavenly day could have anything to do with death.

I had last seen my sister five days before, on Saturday morning. Sophie wore her butter yellow hair in a pony tail, and a shirt with an ant on the front holding up five other ants. The caption said, *Small but powerful*. Sophie had spring fever and couldn't wait to hop on her scooter and ride with our neighbor, Jason Roy, who was waiting for her outside.

"Stay on our street," Mom reminded Sophie as she bounded out the front door.

"Later gaiter," Sophie sang.

Only fifteen minutes could have passed. Jason came running into our house, breathless, his eyes full of panic. "Sophie's stuck!"

As my mother and I raced after Jason, we were still in the Before Zone. That's the place where you will always wish you could rewind to and edit the ending. By the time my mother and I clawed at the mountain of dirt that had swallowed my sister, we had entered the After Zone.

I have managed to light the Shabbat candles for six weeks in a row, one for every year of Sophie's life. After school, I head to the public library, which is one way of avoiding my mother's silence. I've started reading books on Judaism. I have learned that *doing* is more important than believing. I like that idea, because I like to be doing things, and there certainly are lots of Jewish things to do. These things are called *mitzvahs*. Then there is the Torah. *Turn it over and over again, for everything is contained in it.* That's pretty awesome. But how do I begin to "turn it over"? Apparently, I'm too old for Hebrew school.

Mom doesn't get up in the morning with me anymore. So I sit across from my sister's empty seat and eat junky cereal. Before I leave for school, I visit Sophie's room. I feel much better in there with the sunlight surrounding me. I wonder if Mom comes in here during the day. I run my finger across Sophie's nightstand. Not a speck of dust.

A second sign comes to me in the mail. It's a Hebrew/English calendar from the Jewish Federation. The box for each Friday is pink with a Shabbat candle icon. The candle lighting times are listed, too. I discover that Rosh Hashanah is only ten days away. The Jewish New Year. I feel determined that we

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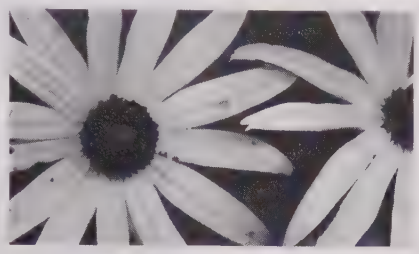
must do something special, other than eating dinner at Uncle Ray's house. Apples and honey. Isn't that the preschool version? There's got to be more to it.

I bring up the subject while following Mom around the house as she dusts the furniture.

"Do you mean services?" she says, incredulously. "I don't think so."

"But we've never gone to temple, except for Danny's bar mitzvah, like five hundred years ago."

My mother dusts the top of the piano which Sophie had just begun to play. "Jess, I'm sorry. I have no need for a temple or any religious service of any kind." She looks at me, perhaps registering my disappointment, and sighs. There are strands of grey in her dark hair that I have not noticed before.



"What is it? Are you mad at the universe or something?" I say, regretting my words already.

"Nice way of putting it, kiddo. Let me tell you a little story. When I was about nine, Grandma sent me to Hebrew school. I hated it. I don't remember learning much, except one thing. On Rosh Hashanah God takes out three big books. One where he writes the names of those who will live the next year, one for all those who will die, and one for those names not yet decided. It terrified me. What a thing to tell a child! That's what I remember of my religious education."

I have no idea what to say to my mother. Aren't these the kind of questions you ask a rabbi?

"Mom. That was a long time ago. Maybe…you had a bad teacher, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't celebrate Rosh Hashanah..."

She waves her hand and continues dusting the family pictures. "I don't think we are ready to *celebrate* anything!"

"Sorry. I didn't mean it that way."

She runs the dust cloth over the lamp shade. "Fine. You want to go to services? Daddy can take you. But good luck finding a place that will let you in if you're not a member. You have to pay to pray on the High Holidays."

I am determined to prove my mother wrong. (Isn't that the job of a fifteen-year-old daughter?) I call the synagogues listed in the phone book. *Yes, sorry, you need to be a member. Yes, we have a few student seats left for one hundred and twenty-five dollars.* No one seems to be giving away complimentary seats. I almost want to say, "I'm the girl who lost her little sister last spring in that freak accident. Couldn't you make an exception?"

But of course, I don't.

Then, the secretary at Congregation Rodef Shalom kindly invites me to their open family service on Rosh Hashanah afternoon. I learn that the name of the synagogue means, "Peace Seeker", and I know this is another good sign. I ask Mom once more to go with me. She is lying in bed again, books and newspapers spread all over the place. Her hair needs washing.

"You need to get out more," I offer. "Try something new."

"I'm not having a good week, Jess."

"All the more reason—"

"No."

We stare at each other.

"Jess. I'm sorry. I cannot go with you. The only thing I can do is figure out how to move through the minutes of each day." Her silent tears fall, making me feel all the worse. "Can…you…understand?"

"Yes, Mom."

The sanctuary of Rodef Shalom is filled with parents and kids. Dad and I sit together in the back. The rabbi is much younger than I imagined. He stands in the middle of the carpeted platform and welcomes everyone. He lets the kids shout, *Happy New Year* in Hebrew. I wonder if he is going to tell them about God's three books. Instead, the rabbi tells us a story about a peasant boy who knew no prayers but yearned to be part of the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur service. So he went to synagogue and offered what he knew, his own little songs about God's goodness. The worshippers were shocked when the boy shouted out his made-up songs. They called him a fool. Yet, this peasant boy's prayers were accepted before the others whose minds were wandering during the holiday service. It was the peasant boy's simple songs, so full of conviction, that opened the gates of Heaven.

The cantor leads everyone in singing beautiful Hebrew prayers. We stand up, then sit down, and stand up again. We read psalms in English. We ask for forgiveness. We ask for life.

It is time for the rabbi to blow the shofar. He brings out a long, curvy ram's horn and tells us how the call of the shofar is an ancient call. It calls us to do good deeds, to move us forward into a new and better year. Dad reaches for my hand.

The rabbi recites the blessing and holds the shofar to his mouth. Everyone stands. The room is silent. I can feel the anticipation. The sound that fills the sanctuary is one I have not heard before. The wail of the shofar pierces every cell in my body, and I know with out a doubt, it cries for all of us. ●

Evelyn Krieger is a writer, reading specialist, and homeschooling mom in Sharon, MA. This is her first published fiction.

Getting

At first it was just another reason to fight – and I was tired of fighting. A Get, a Jewish divorce. Until my mother mentioned it, I had never even heard of such a thing. The year was 1980, years before anyone was writing about a Get. The world had not heard of the plight of Israeli women whose husbands refused to grant a Get. My friends were no help. Not one of my friends was divorced. Talking to my insistent mother, I felt like Bill Cosby's Noah talking to G-d: "Sure, whatever you say. What's an ark? What's a cubit? What's a Get?"

I called my Reform rabbi for information. Yes, he said, a Get was important, no question. It was granted through an ancient ceremony conducted by a court of rabbis. The purpose: to allow a woman to remarry in a traditional ceremony. I couldn't imagine ever remarrying; he suggested I keep the option open and advised consulting my lawyer about logistics. So I called my lawyer, a Jewish elder statesman. A Get? "Of course," he said. "We'll just write it into the civil decree." He made it sound simple.

But in our proceedings, nothing was simple. We had fallen in love in high school, gone steady in college and married within weeks of graduation. Now, twenty years later, we were divorcing. Not easily. As passionately as we loved, now we hated. He had initiated the divorce but wanted it without giving me anything—no money, no assets, no custody. We stayed connected as we fought about every detail. He told his lawyer he refused to grant a Get, then said I would have to pay for it, then told me on the phone he would grant it only if I agreed to the current negotiations.

I felt stymied. I could not find a way to negotiate anything I wanted let alone this new concept, a Jewish divorce. The few folks I confided in had answers, all unworkable. At a party, my neighbor's mother whispered conspiratorially, "No matter what he says, you can force a Get. My rabbi said you could declare him impotent." We giggled at the thought; maybe a woman wasn't impotent in the face of male tradition after all. But it was a joke, not a realistic plan. I knew I'd never have the chutzpah to publicly declare the father of my three sons impotent. My colleague offered to visit him personally and "shame him." He wasn't shame-able; if he felt shame he wouldn't be behaving so shamefully. In the end his lawyer, not Jewish, convinced him to be a gentleman. "You say 'mensch' I think," he said.

In late winter, after four years of arguing, we reached an agreement and the court granted the civil divorce. The decree noted the fact that my husband would grant me a Jewish divorce.

I needed time together in the same room with my groom to hear a rabbi say, "It's all over, *kaput*." I needed an unmarriage ceremony.

I didn't have time to acknowledge I was divorced let alone entitled to a Jewish divorce. My ex-husband remarried within days. My mother became hospitalized for brain surgery. My ex-husband's wife became pregnant. Through spring and summer my children rode the roller-coasters. I was so busy nursing their nausea and upset stomachs I never felt my own.

Six months later as I sat in the synagogue at Rosh Hashanah, surrounded by all the tradition which my ex-husband and I had shared, I suddenly remembered the Get. I was angry with myself. I was yearning for my husband despite the fact that we were divorced. I didn't want to feel this connection to him in shul or anywhere. The civil divorce contained no ritual. Indeed, I had not even appeared in court. "Save yourself the trouble," my attorney had said. "We'll have your husband testify." So after twenty years of marriage, the phone rang at my desk and my lawyer said, "It's over."

I needed more. I was married in a Jewish ceremony rich with ritual: the chuppah, the wine, the exchange of rings, the broken glass. Perhaps an ancient ritual would reach deep into my soul, disentangle the knots and set me free. I needed a time together in the same room with my groom to hear a rabbi say,

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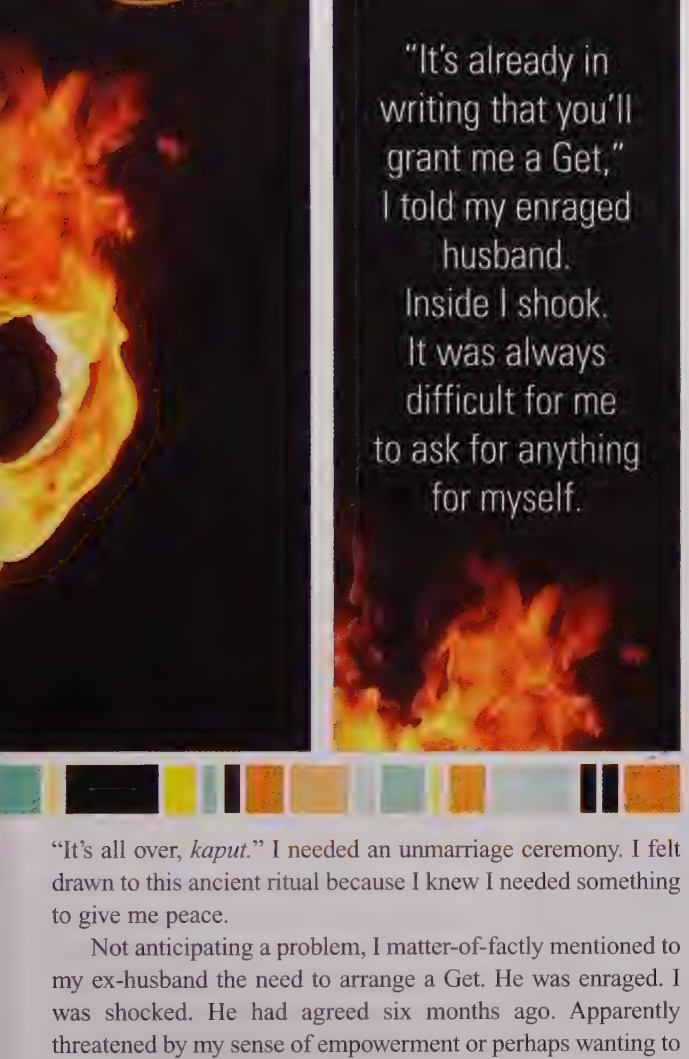
The Get

by Barbara M. Stock


"It's already in writing that you'll grant me a Get," I told my enraged husband. Inside I shook. It was always difficult for me to ask for anything for myself.

"It's all over, *kaput.*" I needed an unmarriage ceremony. I felt drawn to this ancient ritual because I knew I needed something to give me peace.

Not anticipating a problem, I matter-of-factly mentioned to my ex-husband the need to arrange a Get. He was enraged. I was shocked. He had agreed six months ago. Apparently threatened by my sense of empowerment or perhaps wanting to connect again by fighting, he refused. "It's not to argue," I answered, working to keep my voice steady. "It's already in writing that you'll grant me one." Inside I shook. It was always difficult for me to ask for anything for myself. Here I was feeling like a slave, begging again for my freedom. Worse, I realized that all the years of fighting to get something in writing meant nothing to him; he felt above the law.

After many phone negotiations, he agreed to participate in the ceremony but only if I arranged it. My Reform rabbi had surprised me by recommending an Orthodox Get. "That way no one will ever question it," he'd said. So I called the Jewish Rabbinical Council to arrange for the court of three rabbis to perform the ceremony. The male secretary was business-like. Yes, they could convene on Sunday if necessary. The husband is a doctor? Certainly they would arrange their schedules for his benefit. I would need to bring the *ketubah* and the children's *brit* certificates to establish the fact that we were married. The court would ask no personal questions, he volunteered. For the first time I noticed I had been sitting with my back stiff, my jaw clenched even as I talked. I relaxed a bit.

"Of course you don't know your Hebrew name," he said.

The summer before kindergarten, my parents had sent me to a Jewish day camp. The first day of camp, the counselor had asked each of us our Hebrew names. I didn't know my Hebrew name. I knew my name as Barbara. The other children stared. "So stupid not to know your own name." Forty years later, I could feel the old anger mix with the new. I felt my body stiffen again. I was not going to be humiliated in what I'd heard was a sexist ceremony. "Of course I know my name," I said, giving him my name. This was not going to be easy.

It was far from easy. My former husband cancelled that first date and then the next. He was still playing the game of asserting his authority, rendering me impotent. He had remarried and had a child in less time than it was taking him to grant me a Get. The process became a metaphor for our marriage: my pushing myself to define my wants, then screwing up the courage to ask; his agreeing to it, then procrastinating, not fulfilling his word; my waiting, being nice, hoping if I waited long enough, he would eventually come through. Spring. Pesach. Out of bondage. I called my ex-husband, requested another series of dates, again called the Rabbinical Council to arrange the ceremony. And I prayed—for strength, for perspective, and for my ex-husband to actually keep the date. He seemed more casual, less angry, this time. A year had passed for both of us.

Before the appointment, the Rabbinic Council rabbi thoughtfully called to confirm the date, time, and place. I thanked him. "I have been unable to confirm this with your husband," he said. "He was not in his office. You will be sure he comes."

I wanted to scream into the phone, "Are you crazy, Rabbi? I can't control whether he'll cancel for the fourth time!" Instead I took a deep breath and said quietly, "Rabbi, we are divorced. I can't be sure of anything he'll do." I was proud of myself for speaking at all but still embarrassed at the edge in my voice.

"Ah, yes," the rabbi said. "Perhaps I should call him at home. His number is…."

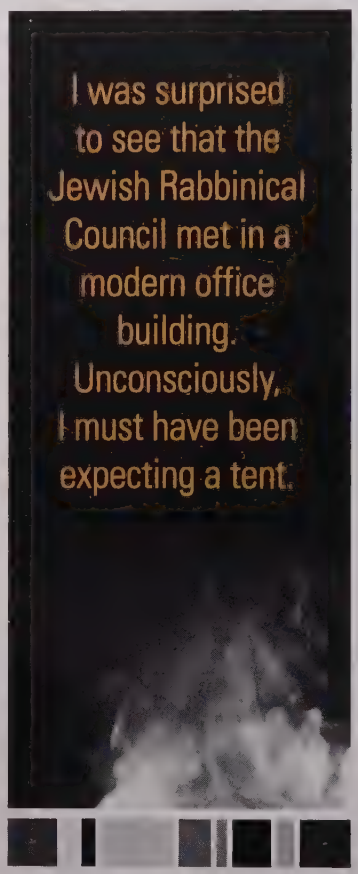
I gave him the correct number and hung up the phone.

I felt nauseous. Another reminder of my impotence. Given the opportunity, would my ex-husband break his word again? If he did come, could I stay calm and handle this ceremony? I rehearsed myself behaving in a mature way, watching the show as if I were a spectator. I vowed not to let myself feel until I was alone after the ceremony.

PHOTOS © MILA TOLEDANO. "CALL ME TOO BASHFUL" STILL IMAGE FROM VIDEO 2002/2003. WWW.MILATOLEDANO.COM

The day of the Get was spectacular, the sort of Sunday midwesterners yearn for all winter. Sunny, soft breeze, tulips opening, peony buds ready to burst. The universe was cooperating with my new beginning. I checked my map to be very clear of my destination, allowed plenty of time and arrived twenty minutes early. I was surprised to see that the Jewish Rabbinical Council met in a modern office building. Unconsciously, I must have been expecting a tent! I parked my car and went for a walk. No coffee shop in the area. Offices. A Chinese restaurant, closed. A ballpark: Sunday morning basketball, a Chicago ritual. I watched the game, then walked back, blocking memories from my mind, concentrating on the present.

An Orthodox rabbi walked into the building. Beard flowing grey-white, dark wide-brimmed hat, long black coat, oblivious of the spring temperature. He was living in his internal reality while I was struggling to stay out of my internal thoughts and feelings. He'd parked his car in front of mine: his, a rusty Buick; mine, a year old Honda. Last year my car had looked worse than his. After the divorce, I'd traded my beat-up Ford for a brand new car. I'd seen the car as an extension of myself, tired, worn down. On Mother's Day, I'd taken my kids with me to buy a new car and give us all a new start. I needed external markers—a car, a Get. The car had not released me. Was I nuts to think that this external marker would provide the internal peace I so needed?


I was surprised to see that the Jewish Rabbinical Council met in a modern office building. Unconsciously, I must have been expecting a tent.

The Rabbi and I rode the elevator together. Obviously we were here for the same purpose.

"It was a long marriage?" he asked.

"Yes, twenty years."

"How long divorced?"

"One year."

"Children?"

"Yes, three sons."

"You have a profession?"

"Yes, I'm a psychologist."

"Then I will ask you," he said gently, "why such a thing must be."

I had asked that question often over the past five years. Now I shook my head. "Some questions have no answers. What I know is that I'll never know." We left the elevator and walked down the hall together in silence. Somehow I felt a bit safer.

The office suite was modern with dark wood paneling in the library-court room. The rabbi I had spoken with on the phone greeted the rabbi and me, then took me to his office to check that I had brought the ketubah and the brit certificate. "Only one certificate?" he asked. I breathed deeply and settled myself before answering. I would not allow him to make me feel bad or wrong or stupid. "I understood you needed only one to establish our names," I said. He agreed.

"We might as well begin," he said. "The others will be here soon." I certainly hoped so. For our wedding, I had arrived early to dress in shul. My groom's sister came into the dressing room to say, "He's chickened out." A joke. Not funny. Would he be here today? The rabbi verified from the ketubah the date and place of the marriage. The other rabbis arrived, one in a business suit, another in a long coat. The scribe would be late. Obviously, my ex-husband was already late. Would he come?

He arrived. The rabbis greeted "the doctor." Funny, he's "the doctor" and I am "the wife," not also "the doctor." I'm not a real doctor anyway. Let it pass. Concentrate on being here. The ceremony began.

Surrounded by holy-looking men, I expected prayers. What we got, instead, was earth-bound, very earth-bound. The rabbis needed to establish our existence. They began with my ex-husband. They knew he was a doctor but now that mattered not at all. He could have been an umbrella mender or a world-famous Gemorah scholar. They wanted proof only that he had been born into his particular family, had been named at a brit, had been called by his name in English, on our ketubah, on our son's brit certificate, on his driver's license, even on his Visa card. In Hebrew, when a bar mitzvah, when called to the Torah, when spoken to by his father, his grandfather. "Who called you this name? When? Any other names?" Over and over, in many ways, the same questions. Exasperating. I felt myself snicker. They're getting to him. But the feeling passed almost as soon as I realized it. Then I felt protective of him, a familiar feeling. "No one uses his legal first name, not even when they're angry at him," I joked. The men smiled. People we were, sitting together. Maybe we could show a little compassion for each other. Maybe.

Time passed. His name was established. They asked him to rise and recite a prayer which established his name, son of his father whose name had also been carefully established, grandson of his father's father whose name had also been carefully established. His mother was irrelevant to his birth and life. She would be hurt to know.

My turn. Respectfully, matter-of-factly, the rabbi asked the same questions of me. My Hebrew name: Bracha. A Blessing. Written on the ketubah, our marriage decree. Written on our son's brit certificate. But how did I know that was my name? How did I know? I knew. At camp, at the age of 4, the counselors called me Bracha. I didn't like my name then; I wanted to be Barbara. My zaydeh called me Bracha. "Pa," my aunt would shout in his ear, "Barbie's here, Shloima's Bracha." It sounded good when she said it. He'd shake his head, acknowledging what he didn't see. I was named for his wife, the first girl-child born after her death, a blessing. In English, Barbara. In Latin, barbarus…barbarian. Jung would have loved it—both sides of a personality in one name. And nicknames? I nodded. I've had many nicknames: Bunny, Boris, Barbie, Bobby. Who called you these? How often? Bobby—my uncle wanted a boy.

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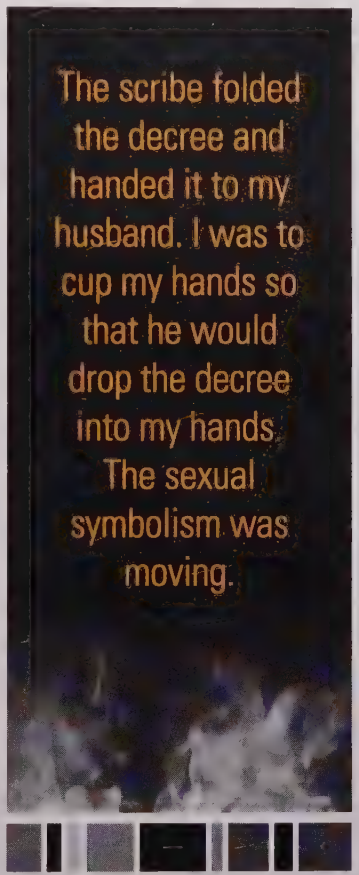
Barbie—even now to my nieces and nephew I'm Aunt Barbie. Duly recorded. I am a person of many names, seen in many ways by many people.

And my father's name? Samuel, Sammy, Shloimi…A man of many names, many endearments. Never the elder statesman, forever the younger brother, the little boy. Forever loved.

My name was established. Bracha Elka, also known as Barbara, as Barbie, as Bobby, daughter of Shmuel, known as Samuel, as Sammy, as Shloimi, son of Shia, my father's daughter, my grandfather's granddaughter. That is who I am. I am not even my mother's daughter still pulling to separate from her umbilical cord and breathe on my own. The struggles from birth fall away. Those are the earthly struggles unrecorded in this document. Here the simplicity is illuminated. I am not my worries, my joys, my career or accomplishments, not even my children. G-d said "I am who I am." And now, I recognize I am who I am, my roots, my essence.


The scribe folded the decree and handed it to my husband. I was to cup my hands so that he would drop the decree into my hands. The sexual symbolism was moving.

The message was implicit: married or divorced, I am who I am. Now the scribe spoke: he was writing on the husband's behalf. Therefore, the husband would need to symbolically purchase the special paper and the ink and pen, then symbolically give them as a gift to the scribe. He did so. The scribe began to write. The others left the room. Someone returned to offer us Cokes. We were alone in silence with the scribe. Quiet, holy space, uninterrupted, no phones, no children, no chaos inside of me instigated by fear and rage. We began speaking of our children, one going to college soon, another to be bar mitzvah. Good boys. Bright. Caring. So much joy these boys bring. We've done a lot right. We may become divorced from each other but we would always be parents of our sons. Memories slid back: the ketubah, the wedding, the births, each brit in a different city, the moves and the changes. We were two children marrying and two adults growing apart. Here we sat, no lawyers, no fights, acknowledging that twenty years ago we shared the dream of a lifetime together. A half hour, perhaps an hour passed. As the scribe wrote our divorce decree, we acknowledged the existence of our marriage.

The men returned. We rose to watch the scribe complete his work. The letters were aesthetically beautiful, a combination of Aramaic and Hebrew. The witnesses checked each letter, questioned some. Check and recheck. Each line needed to have a Hebrew letter that dropped below the line and one that rose above the line so the document could never be cut without cutting each line. Our names allowed many such letters. The men of the Rabbinic Court were pleased. Each signed his name in Hebrew with the pen. The decree was complete.

The scribe folded the decree and handed it to my husband. He instructed him to hold it in a certain way. I was to cup my hands so that he would drop the decree into my hands. The sexual symbolism was moving. I felt tears. He, I noticed, had tears in his eyes. Then with the decree under my arm, I walked back and forth through the room, taking possession of the decree acknowledging that I was once married and now no longer married to this man. I walked through space a divorced woman. I felt strong, self-possessed, independent.

The scribe held out his hand for the decree. With his penknife he scored the parchment so that no one could ever read it and claim it to be defective so that we were not really divorced. Also, the Rabbi explained, on the unlikely chance that two other people could have our exact names and fathers' and grandfathers' names, they could not claim the decree as theirs. We were truly finally disconnected.

Then, "Mazel tov. *Zi gezunt*. Go and be well. Good wishes for a good future." It was as if the groom had broken the glass at a wedding. That's how much release and joy flooded us all. Then we moved out of the room, on with life.

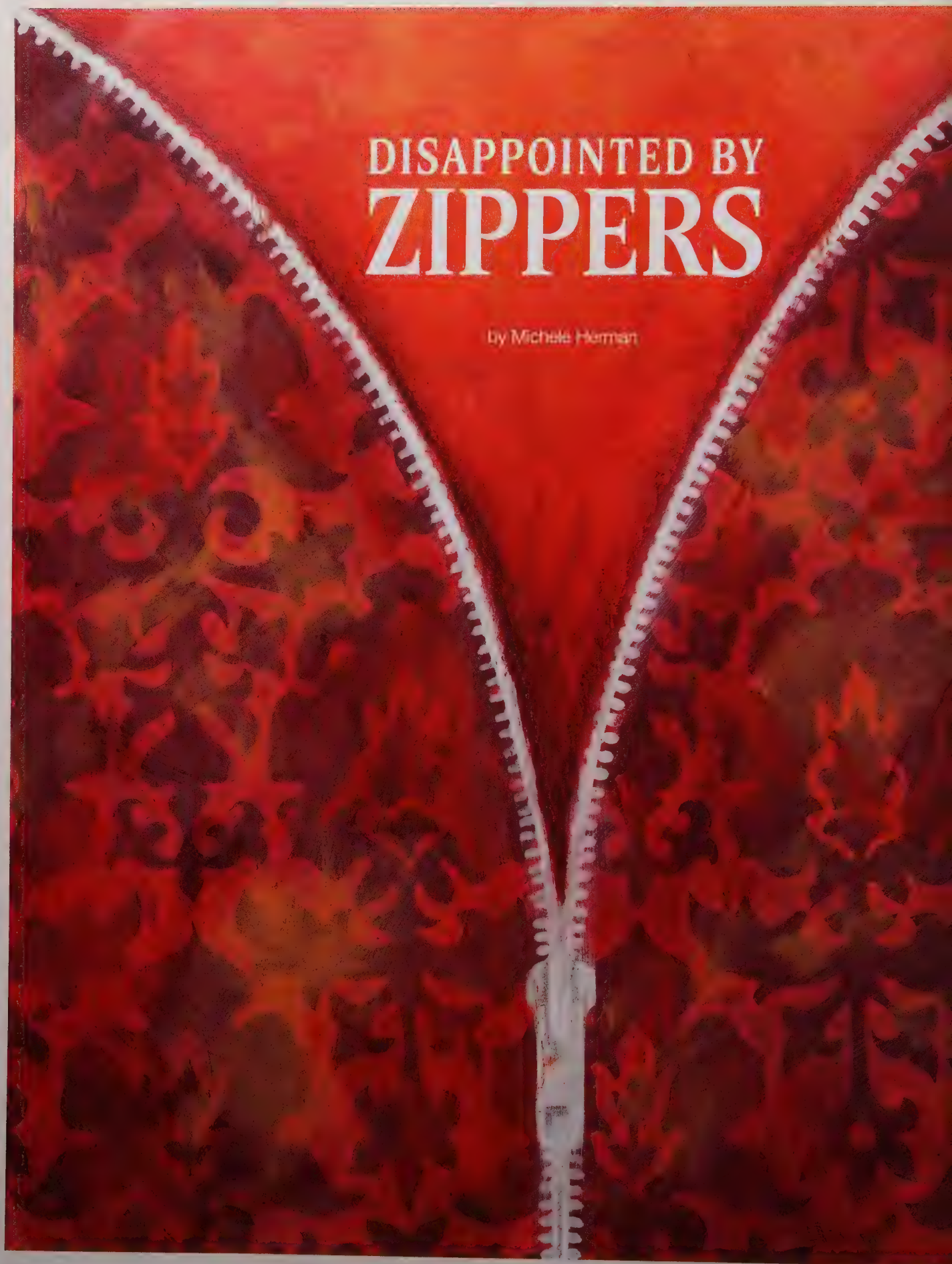
I had promised myself a lovely lunch at a small café with gourmet food, lots of light and live chamber music on Sunday afternoons. It blew my budget but I sensed it would be worth it. I needed a place to settle in, process the ceremony, write some notes so I would always remember. A friend had taken me to dinner to celebrate the civil divorce. This, I knew, would be a deeper celebration. I needed to linger with myself, taking in the reality of a new beginning.

Then I did what I generally did on Sundays in spring. I drove to the baseball field to watch my sons play. Their father, stepmother and baby sister were already there. I love watching babies but I'd never before looked at this child. Finally, I was able to look at the infant in the buggy. And for the first time I could look my sons' father in the eyes and smile, a spontaneous smile.

The Get ceremony did not protect me from the subsequent emotional storms triggered by our passionate arguments in co-parenting. Those bitter fights reverberated so that I could not stand on the bimah for bar mitzvahs or under the chuppah for weddings feeling calm in the presence of my sons' father. For that I am sad. But I know that this was my limitation, not the limitation of the Get.

The Get ceremony accomplished what it was supposed to accomplish: it dissolved our marriage. Something inside me shifted. In establishing my identity in my name, the ceremony supported my reclaiming my Self. I never again saw myself as somebody's extension—never just a wife, just a daughter, just a mother, impotent. I am Barbara, Bracha. I am blessed. ●

Many years after getting the get, **Barbara M. Stock** is happily remarried. She is a psychologist in private practice in Evanston, Illinois, and a freelance writer.



DISAPPOINTED BY ZIPPERS

by Michele Herman

1-888-2-LILITH

On October 4, 2001, I find myself riding my bike from my apartment in the Village to the Lower East Side, land of my forebears, in search of a zipper.

I've been working all morning and want a break. The zipper on my relatively new knapsack is broken—sometimes it works just fine and sometimes it splits apart, each time in a slightly different spot, no matter how slowly and carefully I do it. It's driving me nuts, but I like the knapsack, with its handsome dark gray reflective material. And though I am as sophisticated as any other Manhattanite, I am also my mother's daughter, as she was her mother's daughter, and I still carry a little piece of the shtetl somewhere deep inside; I can't bear to throw things away that still have life in them, especially now. So I get out the Yellow Pages and make some calls. I learn a lot about zippers. I learn there are two kinds: coiled and molded, which I suppose I already knew but had never sorted into categories in my mind. I learn that the things you pull are called sliders. I find out that Feibush and Son on Allen Street is the place to go.

It's another of those fake summer days. I ride my bike across Houston Street to the Bowery. That's when the smell picks up, and I think that if I were smart I would go back home and shut the door behind me. But instead I pass the wonderful lighting stores on the Bowery, with all those hideous chrome lamps right alongside the gorgeous designer ones, and then turn onto Delancey and then Allen Street, one of those vast and brutal Lower East Side thoroughfares where the proportions are out of whack, the buildings too low to border such a wide street. This is a funny thing to find fault with in a city where the buildings are usually too tall and the streets too narrow. Allen Street has always made me feel unprotected, and I wonder why on earth I am riding straight down its fat spine into the burning smell on a crazy, unnecessary errand. Last week the dentist three blocks from Ground Zero and this week Lower East Side zippers.

I am looking for number 27 Allen, and I keep riding south. The air burns my throat. I think I should be wearing a mask, but how can anyone really wear a mask?—after about a minute I always rip the thing off my face and usually break the elastic in the process. I keep riding south—I didn't realize Allen Street was so long. I'm deep in Chinatown, or Chinatown has crept deep into the Lower East Side. For a minute I pick up the stink of fish and it smells lovely—so fathomable, so run of the mill. I am momentarily grateful to the media and the politicians for their discreet vagueness about what exactly the rescue workers are finding mixed in with the smoldering rubble.

I finally reach the southern end of Allen Street. I had somehow expected Feibush and Sons Zippers to be a huge emporium with a wide sign, but it's just a regular skinny storefront in the middle of the block. I lock up and go in. It's the last vestige of Jewishness on the block. I wonder if there's a Chinese zipper store; Chinese people probably have as many zippered garments as Jews. There's a counter and behind it shelves and shelves filled with boxes of zippers. A color sampler on the wall is filled with scores of colors of zippers, gorgeous zippers, and bins on the floor are filled with discounted threads, and a glass display case with notions and scissors. My mother's mother taught her to sew, and my mother taught me, and since I have no daughters I taught my sons young, before they noticed that sewing is still, even in this age of gender crossing and breakdown, considered women's work. There are many skills my mother did not teach me that I wish she had—how to be career minded and confident out in the world, but I am grateful she passed along her sewing secrets. I love entering this specialized world. I love the fact that it exists, that people other than me care about straight pins and pinking shears and dressmakers' chalk.

Like the husbands in the Grace Paley story disappointed by eggs, I am a woman disappointed by zippers.

What's clear today is that this world I love, this world that connects me to my ancestor merchants and tailors, barely exists. It's being eaten up on all sides. And it's dying of old age. I'm trying to carry the torch, but who else would ever think to replace a knapsack zipper?

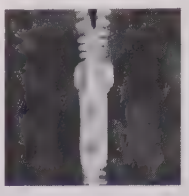
A young and quite handsome man behind the counter with eyes a beautiful clear aqua waits on me, and I think maybe I have been premature in my postmortem. I am more than happy to work with him, but he refers me to an older guy, not so handsome, and disappears into the glassed-in office on the side. When I look into the face of the older man, I notice that he has the same aqua eyes, and I realize that they must be Feibush and Son. Ah, I think, their ancestors must have been raped by the Cossacks just like my husband's, which is how his family always explains the blue eyes. I tell him my zipper problem and he sadly shakes his head.

"How would you feel about navy blue?" he asks. My zipper is black. I screw up my face and give this some thought. I tell him I wouldn't feel good at all. He looks at my zipper and tells me it isn't very good quality. I protest. "But it's a YKK," I say, which I know to be a good brand. He is not impressed. He tells me that the knapsack companies special order what they need and they don't always buy the best quality. We discuss the relative merits of coiled and molded. He tells me my zipper is an odd size and he could cut me one and crimp it at the end. Then he says, "I'll have to charge you too much, and it'll cause me aggravation and it'll cause you aggravation when you try to sew it in. Get yourself a new knapsack." The black guy with the Caribbean accent who also works in the store looks at my zipper, shakes his head and agrees.

I hate to go away empty-handed, especially now, when getting things accomplished goes such a long way toward maintaining the precious equilibrium I've managed to hang onto all through this month. But he's Feibush the zipper man, the patriarch of zippers, and I feel I have to take his advice, feel I have to please him, even though it means he won't do any business. Despite the evidence to the contrary, I pray that Feibush and Son will last, even though I'm the only customer and Allen Street is deserted and putrid-smelling and was no doubt barely hanging on before the 11th. I pray it will last long after whatever shops replace Chinatown when Chinatown disperses, whatever corner of the earth—Afghan refugees?—come along to repopulate and revitalize this immigrant land of smelly animal smells and squalid tenements with Lord knows how many crammed to a square foot of space; I'm sure I don't want to know. That's assuming the engine of immigration keeps churning and New York remains the place to start in the new world, though it's seeming more and more like an old world now. Anyway, I hope that Feibush and Son is still there next time I need an odd zipper. I don't want to shop for a zipper on the Internet.

I ride home. Like the husbands in the Grace Paley story disappointed by eggs, I am a woman disappointed by zippers. The smell is vicious, but at least I am riding away from its source in that heat. My cousin Basia, who's actually back in her apartment in Battery Park City, told me on the phone that in her neighborhood the ground feels hot under her feet. She's been married to my first cousin since 1975, and so I know her feet. They're extremely short but wide feet, even shorter and wider than mine, Polish peasant feet, but unlike me she likes to wear dainty high heels and buys them at some special place she found in midtown that sells unusual sizes. I picture Basia's stockinged feet resting on my mother's highly polished walnut coffee table next to mine back in, say, 1978, in the living room on one of those boring days with relatives when the outside world seemed a million miles away.

A week or so later I find myself on 23rd Street, home to Space Saver Hardware and Sewing Machines, another of my very favorite stores. They have zippers hanging from nails on the wall and I find a black (molded) 30-inch one with a double slider for $3.98 and buy it. The next two evenings I sit close by the table lamp in the living room and work on the zipper, thrilled to have busy work, to take the world and narrow it and narrow it down smaller and smaller, tune out all conflict until there's nothing but this seam with a double row of stitching that needed to be ripped. I think of all the effort I put into projects like this, and all the effort other people put in, and it all feels noble, this honest effort to make things work better or to create new things which, with luck and a good eye, will be beautiful. I think of my grandmother's embroidered Shabbos tablecloth, and the fisherman's-knit afghan my mother made me that sits at the edge of my bed year after year, or will if this endless Indian summer ever gives way to autumn.



I think of artists trying to work out visual problems, and actors reading scripts over and over until they find something in themselves that's truthful. I think of last week's letter to the editor in which the writer said the people who died seemed to have lived lives not of quiet desperation but of quiet inspiration. (Of course it's easy to talk—half the time when I'm in the middle of a sewing project I'm cursing the sewing machine or cursing the thread or the lousy light or the boys who always seem to be doing something highly repetitive like flying a paper airplane that they need me to watch.)

Basia, who's back in her apartment in Battery Park City, told me on the phone that in her neighborhood the ground feels hot under her feet. Basia's been married to my first cousin since 1975, so I know her feet.

And what happens when you love a Feibush and Sons and lose it? B. Shackman novelties, the B. Altman department store? The knitting store that used to be around the corner where, this being the Village, the back room was always filled with a bunch of happily bitchy knitting guys? What if J&R Music World, a couple of blocks from Ground Zero, doesn't make it? What if the little that's left of Little Italy goes in one blow? You miss what's gone, usually at random and unexpected moments. And when something is taken forcibly, even if it was something you never loved, you begin to love it after the fact and to mourn its loss.

You say Kaddish, and in the iambs of the Hebrew—*yisgadal viyiskaddash*—is coded all the grief of all your ancestors. When I was a little girl, I would always wait for the moment in the Friday night service at Temple Beth-El when random people would stand up. It was a little like "To Tell the Truth," the momentary shuffling before you realized who was actually going to stand, get up from the pale green plushy seats that were so satisfying to run your hands over, put a finger in their blue prayer books to hold their place. It seems to me it was usually mothers in their Friday night face powder and their Friday beauty-parlor hairdos still fresh and fluffy, and their good knits, which no doubt they'd asked their husbands to zip up the back for them, and each one was mourning the loss of a loved one. ●

Michele Herman is a New York-based nonfiction and fiction writer.

1-888-2-LILITH

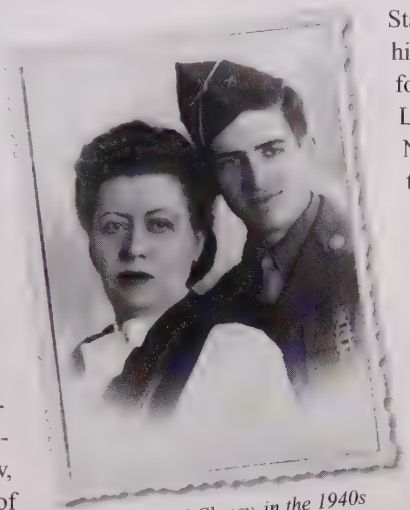
A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN CHARACTER

continued from page 48

but held firmly on the sidewalk in front of her father's shotgun. Mr. Whittacre is a dead ringer for Walter Brennan as a very angry Judge Roy Bean in *The Westerner*. Nate places his arm around Louise, which Jennie smartly slaps away. Whittacre twitches with the effort not to pull the trigger. Now Nate, too, attempts unsuccessfully to escape my mother's grip but Jennie won't let go of him either.

"Don't you two dare move," Jennie commands them in her strike-captain voice. Then she ventures one foot on the lower step of the porch, fishes a Pall Mall from her purse, and politely asks Dad Whittacre for a match. He stares down at her: "Don't smoke."

As we near freeze to death on the sidewalk, Jennie launches her pitch. Oh, I knew that tone, the soft soap. Tranquilized and tranquilizing, calming, steady, soothing, no hint of argument or provocation, burbling about the weather, how pretty Mr. Whittacre's street looks in the snow, just like a picture postcard, the hardship of wartime travel—all without a word from Whittacre or his wife peering at us through her front window curtains. I am pissing in my pants with cold. Jennie flashes her Little-Eva-on-the-ice-floe smile. "Sir, I am a little chilled down here. A hot cup of tea?"



Jennie and Clancy, in the 1940s

I think she is crazy.

Whittacre looks uncertain what to do with his shotgun. Jennie, little step at a time, eases up next to him on the porch and implores. "Or even a small glass of water?" I like that "small." What an actress! How can he shoot a shivering Chicago Jewess over a little water?

I can't recall how, but moments later we are all tensely seated in their living room with Dad Whittacre, having parked the shotgun in a corner, proudly showing off Louise's baby photos. Jennie commiserates. "Tell me, tell me, what happens?" she laments. "Such darling children when they're little." She stares disapprovingly at Louise and Nate—and me. "Now look at them." She shakes her head. "Stubborn. Stubborn as mules. My son over there. I could tell you stories. What is he doing in Detroit in the dead of winter when he should be home with me?" Whittacre relaxes in a wicker chair. "Oh, I don't know," he allows, "Detroit isn't as bad as they say. Would be fine if not for the niggers and Jews, beggin' your pardon, missus." Jennie just sits there nodding agreeably. I suspect Mrs. Whittacre knows Ma's game but is too paralyzed by having a Jewess in her house—three Jews!—to call her on it.

All through the early evening, talking soothing conceding sympathizing—by some magical alchemy of the negotiating process, Jennie parleys a settlement of sorts with the Whittacres. Even though I am there in the room, I don't exactly know how she does it. In the end, Whittacre and his wife, step by painstaking step, agree to (a) forgive Louise this one time (b) keep her at home but not locked in her room (c) loan her money to enroll for a freshman year at Wayne State college and (d) let Louise reimburse him by working part time ("The wage I sweat for is not going to pay for her defiling the Lord Jesus," Mr. W says affably.) In return Nate agrees to stay away from Louise until the following summer, during which he may phone but not visit. While she is grounded Louise must faithfully attend church, but she will not be compelled to appear in front of the congregation to confess her sin as Mr. W. at first demanded. In six months there will be a second family conference to decide Louise's long-term future. "You see," my mother sweetly concludes, "nobody gets anything their own way in this life. We all give up something. Your daughter has stumbled, but as good Christians you have your obligation to redeem, to lift her up. In God's good time, that is. Don't you agree?"

Aghast, I stare at her. The Whittacres are mesmerized. Buying it.

Of course, Nate Manoff broke the pact by sneaking back to Detroit to see Louise Whittacre while her parents were away on a religious retreat and found Louise in bed with a sailor whom she later married but not before she brought the sailor to Chicago for my mother's blessing. Nate came back from the war, having landed at Omaha Beach on D-Day-plus-one, missing two of his clarinet fingers, then, like most Rockets, he married a local Lawndale girl. On his wedding day he rang up my mother and me, cohabiting again in our usual one-room flat, this time in Los Angeles. Nate said, "Thank God for Jennie. Louise's father was right. She *was* a whore. Your mother saved my life."

After hanging up I turned to Jennie. "Ma," I asked, "did you believe any of that stuff in Whittacre's house?" She lit another Pall Mall before replying.

"Whittacre wanted to make a deal," she said. "Any fool could see that. But there was nobody to make a deal with. He was helpless. I just made it easy for him." ●

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Tamar and Arielle

1-888-2-LILITH

coming out in the ORTHODOX WORLD

by Tamar A. Prager

How did we arrive at such a celebration WHEN WE BEGAN IN AVERSION AND SHAME?

I never could have imagined a commitment ceremony for me and my partner, or dreamt that our parents would willingly and lovingly host a magnificent celebration for 165 relatives and friends. This would have been, sadly, only a fantasy. Six years earlier I'd thought of ending my life because I was in love with a woman and could not tell a soul. I felt my only other option was to hide, so I reigned in all of my emotions. Arielle and I shut out all family and close friends, trapping ourselves in a tiny world closed off from our Jewish communities.

Between that narrow darkness and our day of celebration, we and our Modern Orthodox families took a journey that brought us back to the center of a Jewish universe and—most importantly —to ourselves. Last September 25th I stood next to my beloved, Arielle, in the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens, listening to our parents read the wedding blessings that we had written, under our *huppah*. We faced each other, in front of a rabbi and a community of loving, supportive people, and recited our vows, one woman to another.

How did we arrive at a destination marked by acceptance and celebration when we began on a road of aversion and shame? Coming out has been a challenging journey through our own psyches and our communities' strictures, but we've been rewarded with a surprising belief in people's ability to evolve into more accepting souls.

I grew up in a modern Orthodox community whose members shared a belief system which dictated the norms of education, marriage, family life and career. Some people held socially conservative opinions and some were more liberal, but when it came to relationships and marriage, there was no dispute: the heterosexual model reigned supreme, with its single archetype for lovers. These mores were the social canon, fixed and resistant to change, never publicly challenged. As a child, I too never questioned these beliefs, feeling completely at home with its customs and traditions—keeping kosher, observing Shabbat, and more. I saw loving and supportive families, whose heterosexual-couple model showed me the capacity for love and stability. In particular, I drew comfort from the security of my parents' and my grandparents' obviously loving marriages. The pact between the partners seemed to buoy up the wife and husband as well as the community as a whole. As a child I imagined my own future and the man I would marry—Where did he grow up? What would he look like?—never dreaming of a woman as my life partner.

But then came adolescence, and I began to wonder why I never fawned over boys. Women intrigued me, but I didn't permit myself to explore my desire; what I wanted seemed wrong and absolutely unthinkable. Everyone in my family's shul, and in my Hebrew day school, was straight. Year after year, the hetero-normative model implanted itself deeper and deeper into my consciousness, cutting off the circulation to my budding feelings that charted a different path.

Arielle and I first met in high school. We were one grade apart, and although we overlapped in sports, theater and chorus, we lived through our teen years in separate spheres. Then, at Barnard, we found ourselves performing together in a troupe of singers. Hours of rehearsals and performances gave us time to become close friends. Each of us had men in our lives, but our pull toward closeness pushed away any prospects these other relationships might represent.

Soon we were calling each other at night leaving inconse-

quential messages, with coy laughter and excited voices. She invited me to breakfast in the dining hall and I asked her to join me in the library for a night of studying. We proceeded to fall in love, and with each step we took towards each other, we stepped away from those closest to us. I had fallen in love with a gorgeous, tender-hearted, exciting woman, but was not bold enough to tell anyone. I repeated to myself that I was not gay, but that I had fallen for a person who just happened to be female. I couldn't stomach the truth; the thought that I could be gay flooded me with guilt, shame, and self loathing. I assured myself that this relationship was just an exception. After all, I had found men physically desirable in the past; they just hadn't excited me in the ways that my girlfriend did. I justified our relationship by telling myself that I was following my heart, and by doing so acting in a noble manner that somehow excused the gay "part." I continued to feed myself this mantra of self-denial which only served to push away what I knew deep down to be true: that I *was* gay and thus undeniably different from everyone around me.

Our days were a mix of needing each other feverishly but being unable to help one another ease the mounting confusion and loneliness that had taken control of our lives. When in public together, we pushed our emotional selves so deep into the closet that we had to remind ourselves to acknowledge one another at all, bringing me the greatest loneliness, despair and anger that I have ever known. I longed to be close to Arielle, holding her hand and kissing her freely just as our straight peers were doing all around us. Intense desire pulled us together at the same time that a fear of being found out pushed us far apart. This cycle repeated itself countless times a day as we shifted roles back and forth between being lovers and being "just" roommates. We exhausted ourselves by our endless posing and dishonest socializing. I simply watched as others—men—clamored for her attention and coveted her gaze. I desperately wanted the whole world to know that she loved *me*, needed *me*, had chosen *me* as her beloved. That she was mine and no one else's. I became angry at my male friends who unwittingly tortured me with their advances to her and I avoided my three siblings and my parents because I hated the cold death my relationship endured each time I was in the presence of my closest relatives.

I kept my family at a distance, YET I YEARNED TO BE HONEST WITH THEM.

Once, my twin brother politely inquired whether Arielle and I were "together," but after I denied this with vehemence, he knew enough to leave the topic alone. My whole family sensed that I was wholly different from the open, loving Tamar they all knew. I kept them all at a distance, but I yearned to be honest with them. Most of all I craved their advice. What was I to do with a love that would never be accepted by my Jewish community? How could we walk hand in hand to shul—in Arielle's community or my own—without causing a scandal and upsetting the very balance of the universe? I wondered if it would ever be possible to exist as the only openly gay couple in a community of hundreds. Would I be forced to choose between a gay relationship and Judaism?

There were opportunities that screamed, "This is it, Tamar. It's time to out yourself." Occasionally there were women who wanted to introduce me to their handsome sons, and nephews with Harvard MBAs. I was so beautiful, they insisted, why was I not yet dating anyone? I was simply too afraid to tell them the truth. I'd even leave shul before services were finished to avoid socializing. My alternatives seemed pretty limited: tell the truth and risk shame and embarrassment, or lie and feel awash in anger and unhappiness.

Arielle and I argued incessantly over when and how we would ever come out. I explained that I had reached my breaking point, and was no longer interested in preserving an image of myself as straight and "normal." She was not ready to take on people's reactions. I posed these questions to her as well as to myself: How could we ever live whole, fulfilling lives when we were so ashamed of our own desires and behaviors? Why were we still together if it was causing such awful discord between us, not to mention weakening the relationships that were most dear to us?

I started the confessions with my twin during Shavuot, while at my parents' house. I knew he had suspected for years that I was gay, and I could no longer stomach lying to someone so close to me who seemed to be begging for the truth. I approached him at night and asked him to come talk with me in the family room. I soon felt the need for more privacy so we went outdoors and began talking in the driveway—he leaning against the hood of my father's Buick and I standing.

"Ben, there's something I want to talk to you about."

"Did I do something wrong?"

"No. I just want to tell you something important. Ben, I'm dating Arielle. We've been together for a year and nobody knows. You're the first person I've told. You can't tell anyone. Please."

I remember feeling ashamed as I spoke those words to him, but he didn't flinch. He wasn't shocked. And I'll never forget his response—the most supportive I ever received.

"Tamar, that's not strange at all. I totally understand why you *would* be with a woman; *I'm* in love with a woman!" Ben's equating my love with his love, however simple the line sounds, told me that I was not strange or sick. He did not give gender supreme authority in dictating whom I should be with. Gender was irrelevant. He loved a woman, I loved a woman. There was no difference.

1-888-2-LILITH

Months later, after hours of fitful tossing and crying in bed in my childhood bedroom, I told my mother. I felt such tremendous longing for her. Crying desperately, I raced down the stairs and told her my secret. She said everything was alright, and held me close as I buried my face and pushed my body into hers. I explained to her and to the air around us that I loved a woman. My coming out terrified me, but *I was out.* I received the love I needed then, but the path ahead was exceptionally trying.

I told my parents separately, fearing my father's reaction. After all, he held conservative views on most issues and was deeply bonded to Jewish tradition. That his daughter was dating a woman surely did not mesh with his expectations, his view of reality. I asked him to come outside to the backyard so I could speak to him alone. "This is very hard for me, but I need to be honest with you, because our relationship means the world to me. I'm in love with a woman and we've been together for about a year. But—but I'm still attracted to men." This was no surprise to my dad, it turned out; my mother had told him weeks before, while I was still getting up the courage to break the news. He asked surprisingly gentle questions. Did I ever see a life with a man, or would I always be with a woman? I told him I simply did not know. I was with Arielle who had my heart and my devotion, and that was my truth, as near as I could tell.

While my father never spoke to me of disappointment, sadness or anger at my coming out, I can only imagine that my lesbian identity was difficult for him to accept fully. Despite this, he never failed to show me kindness, trying very hard to support me in *my* difficult journey. I watched as he began a process of coming to peace with having a lesbian daughter. He met with community leaders in America and in Israel to discuss the issue. And—true to his usual intellectual thoroughness—he studied texts that dealt with Judaism and homosexuality.

One evening I received a phone message from my father, who sounded happy and relieved. He told me about a meeting that he and my mother had just had with a rabbi whom they deeply respected. They had openly discussed my being gay, and the rabbi told them what mattered most was their love and support for me. Nothing was of greater importance. While Judaism might not accept homosexuality, people must accept homosexuals.

This charge became the keystone around which my parents built their acceptance. They saw the groundbreaking film about Orthodox gays, "Trembling Before G-d," and read books by Orthodox and non-Orthodox writers dealing with the thorny relationship between Judaism and homosexuality. While at times I was hurt by their need to "come to terms" with my being gay (why couldn't they just be happy that I had found a stable, loving relationship?), ultimately I came to respect their process and be grateful for it. How could I *not* be grateful that my parents were working on changing themselves in order to be able to accept their daughter fully as she was? I saw my parents' search as their pledge to support me. I was gay but nevertheless deserved the same respect, unconditional love and consideration that my entire family received. In my parents' evolution towards comfort and acceptance of my lesbian identity, culminating in their recitation of our own *Sheva Brachot* at our commitment ceremony and the memorable speeches they gave when we celebrated, I see the potential that lies within us to change. I understood from their evolution why as individuals, and as a Jewish community, we must learn to accept those who are gay.

With my immediate family I had a doable task. The community, on the other hand, was made up of hundreds, each with their own set of exposures and biases. I vowed to hold my head high with each encounter. There was no official announcement made from the bima, but I had faith in the viral spread of gossip. Then I found out that there *was* no gossip train, because my parents had not told their friends immediately. They needed time to process that they had a gay daughter before making themselves vulnerable by sharing the news with others.

My parents were told that Judaism might NOT ACCEPT HOMOSEXUALITY, BUT PEOPLE MUST ACCEPT HOMOSEXUALS.

The word "partner," my introduction for Arielle, opened a world of confusion and disbelief. "Partner in what?" asked a 60-year-old man at a religious engagement party. Arielle quickly rescued me with her straightforward "partner in life." Uncomprehending, he walked away as if in some kind of stupor. Then there was the *de rigeur* polite exchange while waiting in line at a wedding reception's carving station in our black-tie best. "Tamar, how wonderful to see you. You look great. What have you been up to?" "It's great to see you too; I've been well. Mrs. Levitsky, I'd like to introduce you to my partner, Arielle." Once again, the classic bewildered stare. "Are you music partners? Are you still singing and playing drums in a band?" "Well, yes we are in a band together, but Arielle is ummm....We're a couple." She looks terribly uncomfortable, doing her best with a weak smile. We smile politely back.

Telling people that we were a couple usually elicited a discomfort that would make its way from the gut to the face, as we watched physiognomy change before our eyes. We came to recognize the mixture of disbelief and discomfort. Adding to the social strictures against homosexuality was the misperception triggered by our overt femininity. Being 'femme' acted as a camouflage, keeping almost everyone who wanted to deny the fact from understanding that we were lesbians. Both of us are pretty and well-coiffed, wearing lipstick and jewelry, so how could we possibly be gay? Someone even asked me directly: how I could possibly be gay, because I was so pretty.

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Arielle and I created our ceremony based upon aspects of the traditional Jewish wedding, though ours stood apart from the *halakhic Erusin* and *Kiddushin* of Orthodox marriages. In deference to a body of *halakha* (Jewish law) whose rituals were not intended for gay couples, we agreed early on not to use this traditional model. The basis for our ceremony was the *Brit Ahuvim/Ahuvot* or Lover's Covenant created by Rachel Adler (which appeared in her book *Engendering Judaism*). It relies on the laws of Jewish partnership as a foundation for creating an egalitarian Jewish marriage. Through the reading of the *Brit Ahuvot* and an exchange of rings, we made a joint acquisition of our partnership formed by mutual agreement. The, "seven blessings," alluded to in this article refer to those that we wrote for our ceremony. They incorporate traditional themes of God and humanity, along with themes of great importance to us, namely individuality, acceptance and community. Working tirelessly over the course of a year and a half with Rabbi Ilana C. Garber, we were able to use the beauty of Jewish ritual to honor and celebrate our love and commitment to each other.

I was eager to show people that there was nothing to fear from my loving a woman, nothing to fear by our behaving as a couple. Take dancing for example. Dancing at Jewish weddings. There is nothing as conspicuous as dancing in the center of the room with one's partner. Dancing is what Arielle and I used to gauge our level of comfort in a crowd. A Conservative Jewish wedding…no problem, we thought, they won't bat an eyelash. But many did. From the time we tentatively walked to the dance floor holding hands, eyes were on us, the two femme women who were coupled off. People's stares seemed to ask, "Could it be? Am I understanding this correctly?" They were looks of amazement and interest. While trying to push through the discomfort we could feel many pairs of eyes and their accompanying thoughts fixed on us. And if ever any guests doubted whether we were actually gay, the slow songs gave them their answer. In our early years together we simply left the dance floor; we equated slow music with "We're gay but we don't need to push it in their face."

Whether in private conversations or in public demonstrations on the dance floor, each time I came out I came closer to accepting my gay identity. Not bisexual; gay. One night, resting quietly in bed. I thought about the different times in my life when I had fallen in love with a woman. It wasn't just

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BEING OUT AS A JEW in lesbian circles

by Melanie Weiss

The bar is crushed with women ordering vastly overpriced alcohol, but since this is one of the few places I've been to that serves anything other than sour apple vodka and beer, I don't see fit to complain. My friend and I are nursing martinis that may just put me out a week's groceries, talking to an off-duty police officer and her girlfriend, who are both quite drunk and rather affectionate both with each other and with us. When asked what she studies, my friend Mya answers quite proudly that she's a medic student; "I'm in London for Jewish Studies," I shout over the music. There is a pause. (There is always a pause.) "Oh," Off-Duty replies. Drunk Girlfriend leans over, looks me up and down, and says, "So, what, are you Jewish or something?" I grin and shrug. "What, they don't mind that you're here?" she wants to know, leaning over on her barstool precariously. "I didn't think Jewish girls were allowed to…you know."

And, yes, I do. Somewhere along the line, the queer community went totally and righteously secular and forgot to send me the memo. While the experience of coming out as gay in a religious setting is often traumatic, I've found that being a self-proclaimed shul-going, Hillel-leading, holiday-observing, out-and-proud Jew doesn't make other gay people angry so much as it gets them…mighty confused. "Really?" asks an old friend from high school. "But I mean…*really?*" There are only so many times that I can say "Well, yeah…," only so many times I can explain that my Jewish identity isn't at odds with my queer identity, that while I practice and adore a religion that can be critical of non-heterosexual unions, it is precisely my high level of involvement in Jewish life and learning that gave me the skills to study past that surface criticism. Plus, the *déjà vu* is somewhat alarming: didn't I go through this sort of interrogation already?

I'm zoning out of a lecture from a woman on campus who seems to be threatening to revoke my gay card if I don't snap to my senses about the repression reaped upon our community by organized religion when, finally, I snap. "Look," I say forcefully, "you must get pretty upset when people talk about your homosexuality as a lifestyle or a choice. You must feel like they just don't understand that it's something integral to you, an essential part of who you are. You can't will it away or stuff it down forever, because you know in your heart that it feels right." She nods, confused, missing the parallels that I feel are painted with neon.

I understand why people may feel this way (many religious Jews *do* disapprove of my "lifestyle"), but that doesn't mean they're about to change my mind. And, sometimes, I'm a little miffed on behalf of Jews everywhere: who said there was only one way to be a Jew? I imagine these same conversations a generation ago, slightly re-scripted to replace "gay" with "feminist." How is it possible, people wonder, to care so much about these two things at the same time? How do they both fit inside a single brain? And yet, here we are, proof positive that the trick to holding two things in your heart at once is often just deciding that you will—that you have to. I don't think of my Judaism as any less a part of me than to whom I happen to be attracted. Both things affect my politics, my world view, and my values.

So, yes, I still go out to lesbian bars sometimes, and I still grin a little ruefully into the pause after I explain, for instance, that I'm the world's happiest intern at a Jewish feminist magazine. "Oh, are you…?" But after that pause, while my co-conversationalist searches in her mind for something to say, some query or disarming comment, I like to throw in the zinger: "Yeah, I'm doubly blessed," I say. "Not everyone can be pretty and witty *and* one of God's chosen."

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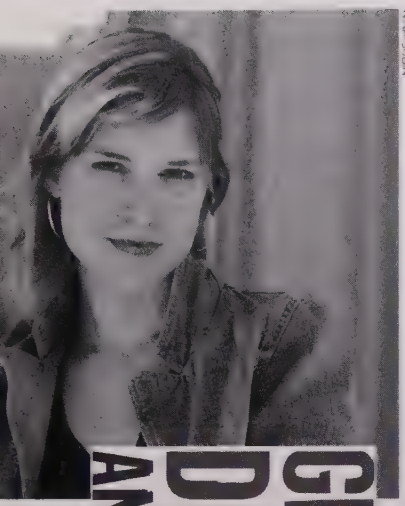
a "deep" friendship. I had fallen for these women while my friends were falling for men. I *am* gay. I said it aloud again and again with a smile on my face, and I felt free.

Today Arielle and I have moved on to find a comfortable place within our parents' communities as well as our own, attending shul, hosting shabbat dinners, and taking part in Jewish Lesbian events. But most importantly…we are.

About one week after our commitment ceremony, our last official celebration was hosted by my parents' friends who felt strongly about supporting and celebrating our recent commitment to one another. Although the community as a whole was uncomfortable viewing it as a traditional *sheva berakhot*, that night marked a historic change in the mindset of some in the room. That night my father gave a *dvar Torah* that spoke boldly about the very nature of what we were all attending. He acknowledged the obvious departure from the norm that was palpable in the room, but he spoke words that began to change the hearts and minds of many that night.

"*Lo tov heyot adam levado*"—it is not good for man to be alone, my father quoted from the Torah portion in Genesis. "*Eeseh lo ezer knegdo*"—I will make him a "helpmate." My father went on to explain that the word *ezer* is gender neutral. God did not say I will make Adam a woman, but simply a helpmate. My father spoke deliberately and with passion; perhaps, he said, we can learn from this that the profound need for companionship and love does not need to be fulfilled in someone of the opposite sex. We all have a right to live and love freely with our chosen companion. ●

Tamar Prager received her MPH from Columbia University and currently works in the health care industry as a consultant. She lives in Manhattan with her partner.



GENERATION DEBT
WHY NOW IS A TERRIBLE TIME TO BE YOUNG
ANYA KAMENETZ

Striving no longer **means thriving**.

The Strapped Generation

As a child in the early 1920s, my maternal grandmother peddled baked goods on gritty New York City streets to help her widowed, Romanian mother put food on the table. Grandma Bessie married a hardworking Polish immigrant and rented an apartment in a leafy section of the Bronx, where my mother and her sister were raised. By the time I was born in 1979, both of my parents had earned graduate degrees without incurring significant debt, and had purchased a two-story colonial in a comfortable New York City suburb.

America in the 20th century afforded my family, and millions of other American Jews, unprecedented social mobility. Today about 55 percent of American Jews have bachelor's degrees—twice the national average. For our parents and grandparents, striving largely meant thriving, and all but ensured that one generation could provide for the next a superior education, a higher standard of living, and many more choices.

Yet for those coming of age in the early 21st century, traditional markers of success like college and graduate degrees, stable employment and home ownership are increasingly beyond reach, according to two new books that probe the financial plight of the nation's young adults.

Anya Kamenetz in *Generation Debt: Why Now is a Terrible Time to Be Young* (Riverhead, 2006, $23.95) and **Tamara Draut** in *Strapped: Why America's 20- and 30-Somethings Can't Get Ahead* (Doubleday, 2005, $22.95) reveal how the soaring cost of higher education, the chokehold of college and credit card debt, and the proliferation of low-wage, temporary jobs are tempering the ambitions of America's 20- and 30-somethings.

Much ink, in recent years, has been devoted to the so-called "opt-out revolution." Newspapers and magazines frequently write about well-educated and well-heeled mothers who leave the workforce to stay home and raise their families. Kamenetz and Draut, in their respective oeuvres, call attention to another opt-out revolution—that of young and capable coeds, who, fearing crushing student loan debt, opt out of college and thereby limit their employment options.

Young people who do manage to earn bachelor's degrees often find themselves underemployed, working without benefits to repay their student loans, Kamenetz writes in *Generation Debt*. In this, her first book, she explains how, with the cost of higher education outpacing household incomes and with federal tuition subsidies accounting for an ever smaller fraction of college tuition, students are forced to borrow increasingly large sums of money to get through school "The common thread joining all members of this generation is a sense of permanent impermanence," writes Kamenetz, a journalist and the daughter of *The Jew in the Lotus* author, Rodger Kamenetz. "It's hard to commit to a family, a community, a job or a life path when you don't know if you'll be able to make a living, make a marriage last or live free of debt."

Generation Debt weds extensive qualitative research with reported tales of economic stagnation. Despite its overabundance of choppy, impersonal narratives about the young and cash-strapped, the book offers up pitch-perfect insights into why so many young adults can't seem to access the American Dream.

Erudite and tightly written, *Strapped* treads similar terrain but also suggests a bevy of thoughtful ways to reverse the "Debt-for-Diploma System" that keeps young adults sprinting in place, if not slipping behind their older counterparts. Draut—the director of the Economic Opportunity Program at New York-based think tank, Demos—refutes the notion, so often propagated in the media, that "Generation Debt" is a spoiled and lazy cohort whose sense of entitlement has brought on its economic woes. She argues, instead, that adults "socialized during an era of 'personal responsibility' and capitalism on steroids" expect too little from society and too much from themselves.

"They don't want penthouses or hot tubs or fancy cars," Draut concludes. "They dream of achieving what we've come to classify as a middle-class life. In one generation that dream has become elusive."

—Gabrielle Birkner

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Science-Fiction

Allegra Goodman's latest novel, *Intuition* (The Dial Press, 2006, $25.00) tells the story of a cancer-research lab in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where extraordinary results electrify and unsettle the researchers. Sandy Glass, a charismatic oncologist, and Marion Mendelssohn, a conscientious bench scientist, direct the work of their postdocs and lab techs, who form this novel's ensemble cast. The plot follows the twists of romance, rivalry, and partnership, as well as the surges and lapses of expectations, devotion, and honesty that are more familiar to us from novels about husbands and wives, parents and children, lovers and siblings.

Goodman uncannily portrays lab culture: the humor, compulsive work ethic, and habit of delayed gratification that scientists use to cope with the uncertainties of achieving either significant results or the grant funding to keep trying. She lays bare the forces that drive her characters and the consequences they suffer with such delicate sympathy that each seems worthy of our interest. At the same time, she explores that old, intriguing question: Are art and science enemies or friends? Need imagination and fact be at odds? The two head scientists lean in opposite directions when it comes to this issue.

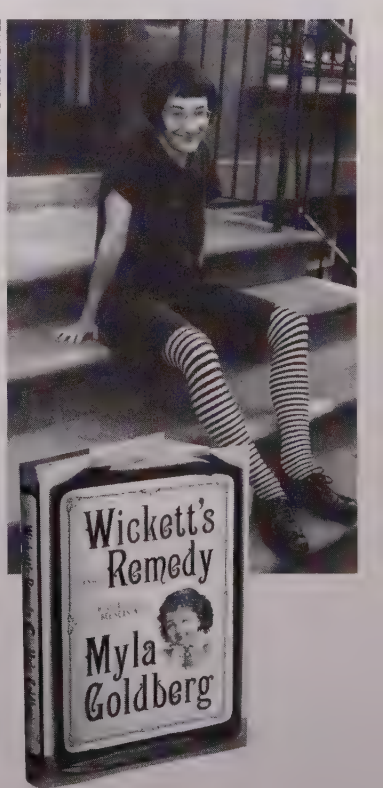
Sandy, who avidly pursues celebrity and major funding, is a self-made man, a determinedly assimilated Jew, a cheerleader to desperately ill cancer patients, and someone who understands "the value of enchantment." Does he overreach, or does he recognize a deeper truth: that information—including the apparently curative effects of a virus injected into tumor-ridden mice—is only as meaningful as its implications in the larger picture of human hopes? Marion, on the other hand, whose meticulous preparations for Passover are her only form of Jewish observance, uses doubt as "a kind of intelligence," a tool to chip away all but the purest truth. When accusations of fraud surface, all of the scientists struggle, according to their inclinations, with belief and skepticism.

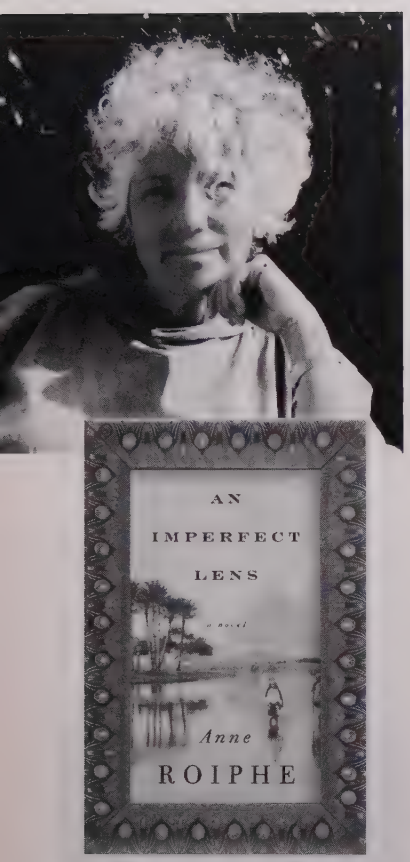
Moving among multiple points of view, the book mirrors the complexity of current science, which is no longer a story of the life and discoveries of a single Great Man—Newton, Darwin, Pasteur—but a subtler tale of the gradual accretion of information through teamwork and competition. The book's contested discovery arouses suspicion because it seems "too good to be true." Perhaps anything so dramatic, anything with the pleasing form of a good story, must spring from the world of wishes rather than science, where findings are generally small and ambiguous. In this novel, Goodman has created a story of science that captures both the truth and the imagination.

Two other recent novels also take up medical research, but use real-life epidemics as dramatic backdrops. **Myla Goldberg**'s cluttered novel, *Wickett's Remedy* (Doubleday, 2005, $24.95), is set during the First World War and concerns the life of Lydia, who manages twice to escape her Irish Catholic, working-class Boston neighborhood. First she marries Henry Wickett, an invalid who drops out of medical school on the brink of the 1918 influenza pandemic to promote his Remedy. Lydia designs the label and concocts the recipe. Later, widowed and back home, she escapes again by volunteering as a nurse's assistant in an historically-based U.S. Public Health study directed at discovering the cause of the illness by attempting to infect Navy convicts.

Interposed between Lydia's experiences are period newspaper articles (comparing "germs" and "Germans") and episodes from the life of Quentin Driscoll, Henry Wickett's partner, who steals the recipe for the Remedy and turns it into a fictional multi-million dollar cultural icon called QD Soda, only to become haunted late in life by his crime. Much of the QD Soda narrative is presented in the form of peppy QD newsletters about fan-club reunions, memorabilia, and the sainted life of Quentin Driscoll. On top of all this—or rather, on the side—the margins of the book contain stilted commentary by a community of the dead who regularly offer their two cents on Lydia's story. This intriguing conceit disrupts more than it illuminates.

Although Lydia's 1918 Boston life is vividly depicted, and the ravages of the flu are terrifying (especially in light of current anxieties about a bird flu pandemic), the elements of the book fail to cohere. Even the ethical





and personal dramas of the medical study on human subjects, which should come clearly to the fore, disappointingly disintegrate. Instead, the book ends with a failed experiment, a gratuitous, gory autopsy, and a nurse-soldier romance—piled-up plot elements lacking any meaningful pattern.

In her historical novel *An Imperfect Lens* (Shaye Areheart Books, 2006, $25.00), **Anne Roiphe** creates a kind of suspense by detailing her characters' numerous near-misses with cholera in late nineteenth-century Egypt. The slices of pineapple they turn down, the narrator tells us, have been cut by a knife sharpened on a whetstone dipped in water contaminated by human waste. Another kind of suspense, or perhaps sympathy, arises from the gap between this microbe-level omniscience and the ignorance of the earnest French scientists who are on a mission to Alexandria to discover the cause of cholera. Does it come from bird droppings? Rainwater? In the midst of other intrigues, a romance develops between an Alexandrian Jewess named Este and one of the scientists as they work together in the laboratory. The lovers fear run-of-the-mill opposition to their intermarriage, but are thwarted by even larger disasters in the last days of the epidemic. The French scientists lose the race of discovery to a rival German scientist, cholera at last claims a central character, and Este's family must flee anti-Jewish hostility to find safety, ironically, in Germany. Cholera and anti-Semitism, it seems, subside at times, but will inevitably flare up again somewhere else.

—Shala Erlich

Israeli Street Names Familiar as Old Friends

Authors **Batya Gur** and **Yael Hedaya** colonize the literary landscapes of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, respectively, in novels deeply rooted in the geography of Israel today. Gur's detective novel *Murder on Bethlehem Road* takes place in Jerusalem's Baka neighborhood, where the order of the streets (Reuven, Shimon, Levi, Yehuda) parallels the birth order of the twelve tribes. And Hedaya's intimate domestic portrait *Accidents* is set in the cafes and apartments of downtown Tel Aviv, with its Bauhaus architecture and towering date palms. Reading these novels is like embarking on a guided tour of the neighborhoods of Israel's two largest cities—except that you don't need to put on sunblock before setting out.

Murder on Bethlehem Road is the latest in the popular series of detective novels featuring Michael Ohayon, the affable Moroccan-born Chief Superintendent of Jerusalem's Special Crimes Unit. Ohayon is called to the attic of an old Arab house under renovation, where the body of a beautiful young woman is found brutally bludgeoned. She is identified as Zahara Bashari, the daughter of Yemenite immigrants who had been probing one of the worst scandals in Israeli history: the kidnapping of Yemenite babies during the early years of the State. Ohayon and the other members of his unit attempt to penetrate the closed circle of Zahara's Baka neighborhood, from the illegal Arab worker born in Ramallah to the gay Australian lover of Zahara's neighbor to the fat little girl named Nessia who mysteriously disappears with her dog shortly after the murder. As the detectives walk up and down the streets that intersect Bethlehem Road, Baka's main artery, the neighborhood comes vividly to life: We see the abandoned old house at 8 Mordechai Hayehudi; the kiosk on Yehuda Street; and the synagogues on nearly every corner. ("What is this, like in Meah She'arim?" asks one of the detectives, when she and her partner stumble upon yet another mikvah.)

But it is not just the geographical reality that Gur explores in this novel; she also maps out the tensions that lie at the heart of the Israeli political landscape. Set during the Al Aqsa Intifada, this novel deals with the rift between Arabs and Israelis and, even more significantly, with the hostility between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim. ("You don't behave like a Moroccan," the ever-professional Ohayon is told by the lawyer whom he interrogates about Zahara's murder.) We learn, too, about the impact of the Holocaust on Israeli society, where children grew up in the fifties with constant hints of the horrors that took place "over there." And we come to understand what it means to live "despite the dead," in an age of riots and bombings and the dirty laundry that is inevitably aired among neighbors in close quarters. "What's disgusting is this city, with all its filth. It's all coming out now, and not just the garbage,"

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Michael's lover remarks. "If you want a bit of beauty around here, you have to look upward, toward the sky, and not at the streets." Yet, like David Grossman's *Someone to Run With*, this is very much a novel of the streets—of the "Jerusalem of below" rather than the "heavenly Jerusalem."

While part of Yael Hedaya's *Accidents* takes place in Jerusalem's German Colony, the book as a whole is very much a Tel Avivian. Hedaya tells the story of Yonatan Luria, a moderately-successful middle-aged author living in a small apartment with his pre-teen daughter Dana. Two years after his wife's sudden death in a car accident, Yonatan is trying to get back to writing, and Dana is struggling to fit in at school. Through a mutual friend, Yonatan is introduced to Shira Klein, a best-selling novelist in her mid-thirties whose father is slowly dying of old age. With Dana cheering them on, Yonatan and Shira overcome their emotional scars and fall in love with one another.

Like *Bethlehem Road Murder*, Hedaya's novel refers to the names of streets and junctions as if they are familiar old friends. It is not long before we can recognize Allenby Street, where Shira's father's architecture office used to be located; Shenkin Street, site of Yonatan and Dana's favorite café; and the Ganot interchange, where the traffic eases up between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. "It was not Sodom on her mind but Tel Aviv," Hedaya writes of Shira. "How normal it seemed now, how like itself, persistent in its collective disregard of private suffering." Through Yonatan and Shira's eyes, we also come to appreciate the pulse of life among secular Israelis, who resent the presence of kashrut certificates instead of menus in restaurant windows, and who stay away from long skirts and hats lest they be mistaken for "the religious."

Yael Hedaya continues to bring Israel to life through her writing; her latest novel, *Eden*, came out in Hebrew earlier this year. Batya Gur died tragically of cancer in May 2005 at the age of 57, yet one of her books still awaits translation into English. Though the road map that these novels lay out is very different from the one we may read about in the newspapers, the Israel they depict is no less real.

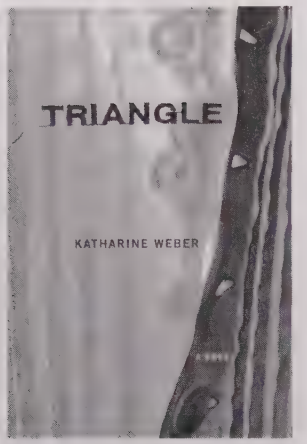
—Ilana Kurshan

Fixated on Our Own Brand Names?

In this novel by playwright **Wendy Wasserstein**, contemptible social climber Judy Tremont is "secretly sure she could write one of those Park Avenue princess novels." From the very first page of *Elements of Style* (Knopf, 2006, $23.95), the reader is barraged with the names of fashion designers, prep schools, and socialites real and invented. Among the invented is Samantha Acton, a "thoroughbred" Upper East Sider whose attendance at any party guarantees its inclusion in the gossip columns. Samantha's husband is a dermatologist whose office refrigerator is "the most exclusive club for butt fat in the country." Then there is Barry Santorini, a wildly successful director with pockmarked face, trademark sweatshirt, and roots in the working class. His wife Clarice lists as her number-one skill the ability to manage the staff in their four homes.

So what separates Wasserstein's *Elements* from the Park Avenue princess novel? Perhaps it's the inclusion of Dr. Frankie Weissman, an angelic pediatrician who treats both the spoiled brats of the Upper East Side and the asthma-plagued children of East Harlem, while simultaneously remaining devoted to her ailing father. Of all Wasserstein's characters here, Frankie shows the most evidence of a thoughtful and sincere inner life, though she's fixated on her own brand names: Spence, Princeton, and Mount Sinai Hospital, instead of Hermès, Mercedes, and Saint-Tropez.

The book begins with Frankie reuniting with former classmate Samantha in the fall of 2001. A few adulterous affairs and a few more dinner parties follow, but in place of a true plot, Wasserstein presents a cast of characters to evoke New York City in the immediate aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center. These are all individuals not directly affected by the horror, but who experienced the same fear and anxiety as the rest of the city—albeit with Cipro packed in Fendi emergency kits. Near the end of the novel, Wasserstein veers from what did in fact happen to what might have been. Her description of a second attack the following year seems contrived, although it may be because the reader will certainly still remember the awful reality.



Setting the novel in the recent past is risky because so much of the dialogue is cocktail party chatter. Continuity-obsessed readers may find themselves pulled out of the story as they wonder why *The Nanny Diaries* and the Vioxx recall appear before their proper historical moments. Most egregiously, the very title of the novel is based on a chronological misstep. It refers to Jil Taillou's secret struggle to perfect his language by memorizing William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White's handbook *The Elements of Style*. White's edition was not published until 1959, a full four years after Jil is alleged to have inscribed his own copy as a high school student.

Even with cartoon-like characters and a half-baked plot, Wasserstein manages to address motherhood, social status, loneliness, and aging in this sweet, entertaining, and engrossing novel. However, one book was not enough for Wasserstein to make the transition from playwright to novelist. Unfortunately, her recent and early death means that her debut novel will also be her last.

—*Sara J. Marks*

The Triangle Fire

The Triangle Shirtwaist Fire of March 25, 1911 is familiar to Jewish feminists as the terrible event that took the lives of 146 garment workers, mostly young Jewish women. This tragedy helped empower the first generation of American Jewish women to engage politically and transform workers' lives in this country. Indeed, this event is so foundational—and at the same time so remote—that transcending the well-known historical record to experience this moment more intimately now seems almost impossible. Yet **Katharine Weber**'s self-consciously Rashomon-like novel, *Triangle* (FSG, 2006, $23.00), remarkably affords us this opportunity. Weber takes the reader deep into the imperfect memory of the last living survivor of the fire, Esther Gottesfeld, who lives her nightmare again and again. When the novel opens, Esther lies dying in a nursing home, but we hear her voice often throughout the novel—first in her recollections published by the International

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Ladies' Garment Workers' Union on the fire's fiftieth anniversary; then in three interviews she gave to feminist historian Ruth Zion shortly before she died; and finally in the testimony she gave at the trial of the factory's owners mere months after the fire.

The present-day action of the novel centers on Esther's granddaughter, Rebecca; her husband, George; and their interactions with Ruth Zion after Esther's death at the beginning of the novel. Rebecca, George, and Ruth are all unevenly drawn, strangely unsympathetic characters whose stories, though full of their own tragedies, never match the power of Esther's.

The core of each of Esther's retellings, interspersed throughout the modern-day narrative, is the same: On the day of the fire she was able to escape by following her boss out of a door to the roof normally barred to the workers. The door may or may not have been locked. None of her coworkers, who included her younger sister, and her fiancé, recognized this escape route. After she herself was rescued, Esther watched her fiancé and sister jump from the burning building to their deaths. Six months later, she bore a fatherless son.

These recollections, however, differ in their subtle details. Esther's words are pitted against themselves in the search for the hidden truth of what really happened that horrific day, a quest initially driven by the self-interested Ruth, but eventually taken up by Rebecca and George as well.

Weber telegraphs Esther's secret to the reader almost from the beginning; her heavy-handed cataloging of Esther's confused memories points too obviously towards a schism in Esther's identity as a result of the trauma she endured. Nonetheless, the conclusion of the novel is shocking and compelling; the book ends in Esther's voice, and this time her story is so immediate that the confirmation of the secret is unexpectedly moving, and the tragedy—of the fire, of Esther, of all the women at the Triangle, of all women who worked in sweatshops then—sears us in ways that earlier chapters or the historical record wouldn't have predicted. The Triangle Fire is that rare benchmark event that allows us as Jewish feminists to measure directly not only how far Jewish women have come in America, but also how far the social change we helped instigate has carried society. While *Triangle* is not intended as a yardstick, it invites us to take stock in a way we might otherwise never have done.

—Tammy Hepps

Mothers in the Trenches

Being a pregnant woman in her mid-30s in the 21st century seems to attract strange questions that I thought would have been resolved by 2006. Numerous friends, acquaintances

Shade of My Grandmother

by Susan Terris

"Oh, Playmate,
Come out and play with me..."

When she comes, I'm in her shoes, poised
on peasant feet. She, her eyes
a scrim of smoke, is silent, exhales
sparks of bright light;
and, wind in
her hair, she runs through
aspens ringed by cigar-haze from
the grandfather I never met.

Grandmother sings as grandfather
lifts, ravishes her against
the cellar door. At first light, smoke,
fretted aspen leaves
protect them.
Cellar door, someone famous said,
the most musical words in English,
and, in French, the word
crépuscule—dawn. Both: boy-soldier tunes,
boy who comes home to slide
on a cellar door—which grandmother
thought was a song
about rain barrels
before dawn—when she was young
and didn't know
what her shade can't forget:

how her playmate will vanish
leaving
babies and debts, haze and silence
and leafless aspens,
while brightness
fades, turning her to a ghost
who no longer greets the dawn
opening a red cellar door.

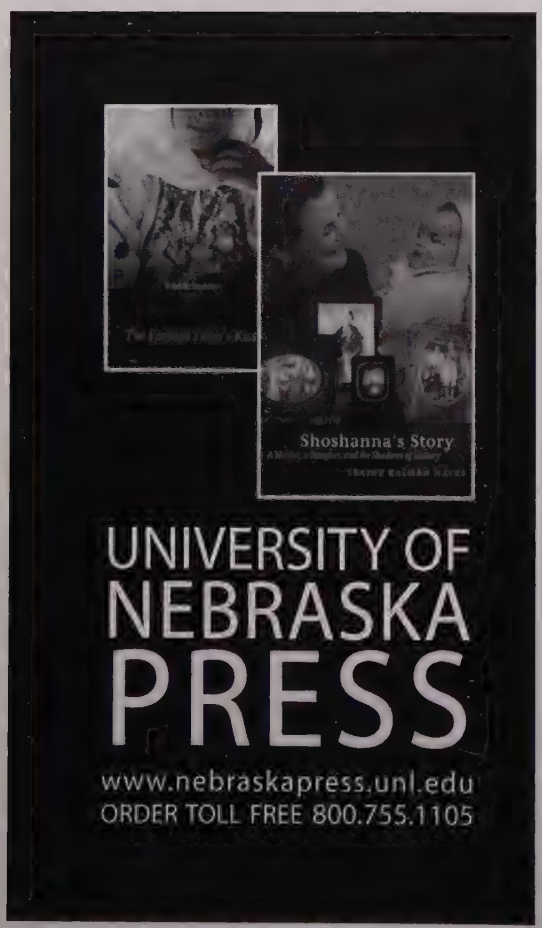
When the Messiah comes, we'll hear about **the "Daddy Wars."**

and colleagues have asked me variations on "Will you go back to work after the baby is born?" Most of these well-meaning questioners know that I have both academic and professional credentials that announce "Feminist," and that I have studied and published on work-life issues and women's advancement in secular and Jewish organizations.

It's disconcerting to see how a "trend" among some highly-educated professional women who've left high-powered jobs to stay home with their children seems to have invaded popular consciousness to the extent that I have to field questions like this one. So naturally I was drawn to *Mommy Wars: Stay-at-Home and Career Moms Face Off on Their Choices, Their Lives, Their Families* (Random House, 2006, $24.95). This book is an anthology by 26 mothers commissioned by **Leslie Morgan Steiner**, an executive at The Washington Post, to write about their lives and the choices that they made regarding children, work, and their ambitions. The contributors, ages 25 to 70-plus, have a range of lifestyles—one-third work full time, one-third work part time and the rest have no paid employment outside the home. Some have also switched back and forth between the two arenas at different points in their lives.

The book's press release declares breathlessly, "In communities all over America, stay-at-home and working moms notoriously separate into two defensive and self-righteous camps, unable to discuss the difficult compromises both sides are forced to make in order to achieve their own personal goals." Yet, while some authors in this anthology loudly proclaim the rightness of their choices to either work or take care of their children fulltime, most explain their decisions as a result of necessity (dealing with an autistic child or single parenthood) or temperament—either their own or their children's.

Contributor Susan Cheever cites fatigue as one of the flames that fan the "Mommy wars." "For one thing, we're too sleep-deprived to be tolerant or temperate....Working moms and stay-at-home moms are like the famous psychology experiment in which too many rats are put in a cage with too little food. The rats *have*



Shoshanna's Story
A Mother, a Daughter, and the Shadows of History
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The Fortune Teller's Kiss
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"Poet Serotte relives a childhood cataclysm in this culture-rich, affecting memoir, part of the American Lives literary nonfiction series. In 1954 she contracted polio, mere months before Jonas Salk perfected his vaccine-a coincidence that struck her Sephardic Jewish household as especially cruel. The drama of Serotte's struggle to walk again, filtered through the tender emotion of youth, creates an aromatic narrative brew that reveals her destiny in riveting detail."—*Publishers Weekly*
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had enough sleep, nevertheless, they kill one another." Lois R. Shea believes society's lack of appreciation for the skills parenting requires leads to conflict among mothers. Despite the fact that "stay-at-home mothers" are lauded in our society, she notes, "We don't compliment parenting, I suppose, because parenting is supposed to be an innate skill, like breathing or digesting food. You should be rewarded for knowing how to breathe?" She offers "Mommy Association Awards" as a truce: if mothers "had those trinkets of peer admiration, we'd be less likely to see our failings in one another's strengths."

Few of the essays address the political context for the "mommy wars." That there is no government support for childcare, or for parents who want to stay home with children, or for meaningful and well-compensated part-time work, are among the many external factors that fuel these ultimately destructive conflicts between women. We're so busy fighting over who is a better mother that we don't have the time, energy or thought to advocate for the social supports that parents have in the rest of the civilized world.

There is also one character group missing in these powerful narratives—the men who "got" these women pregnant (all of the contributors seem to be in heterosexual relationships). When men do appear, you realize one reason for these mothers' resentment. Inda Schaenen, a self-described "radical feminist stay-at-home mom," muses that on the double standard for men and women for childcare. "Men and women alike pronounce rousing huzzahs for any father who manages to tie shoelaces in a morning rush, or remembers for once that little Alex is allergic to soy sauce. What a Great Dad!" Other men seem to think that their economic contributions to the household excuse them from any childrearing responsibilities. Leslie Lehr's husband can walk "right past a pile of dirty clothes to get to the back porch, as if his paycheck gave him a pass." When she responds to his offer to join him on the porch by saying, "I have to finish the taxes and pay the bills," he smugly corrects her: "I'm the one paying the bills.... We made a deal when Juliette was born that you would do everything else." Maybe these mothers can't bear the thought of unleashing anger at the men with whom they share their lives, for fear of where it could lead, so they find it easier to turn it on other women, who ironically might be stuck in similar situations.

Maybe we'll know that the Messiah has come in Her time when there's a companion anthology about the "Daddy wars," where "working fathers" and stay-at-home-dads duke it out on paper over who is a better parent. *—Susan Sapiro*

Anne's Boyfriend

Whether we know her from a history textbook, a museum exhibit, or the play based on her diary, the prominent role Anne Frank

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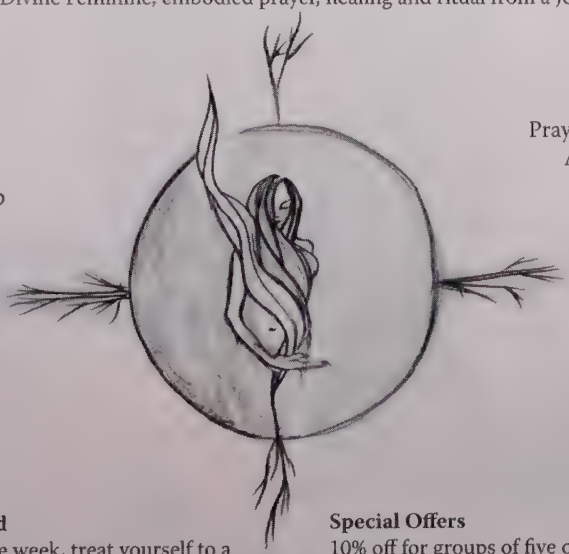

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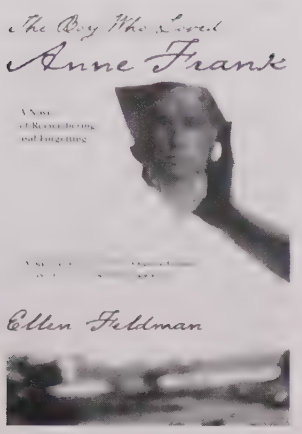

occupies in our collective psyche is undeniable. Yet author **Ellen Feldman** uses the historical Anne to tell quite a different Holocaust story in *The Boy Who Loved Anne Frank* (Norton, 2005, $23.95).

Inspired by a tour of the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, Feldman fictionalizes the survival and subsequent self-reinvention of Peter van Pels, the young man who hid with Anne and her family from 1942-1944. The Peter of Feldman's imagination survives the final days of the war and immigrates to the United States. After clearing customs with his religion undocumented, Peter decides to create a new identity, one disconnected from his past and heritage. "I was born six years ago in a customs shed on the Hudson River," he declares, recalling his first moments in the United States. Peter soon replaces his life in the secret annex with a thriving business and a loving wife in the suburbs of New Jersey.

The book is marked by a series of complicated obstacles that test Peter's resolve to deny his past to himself and to conceal his traumatic history from others. Peter's first love in America is a Jewish girl named Susannah, whom he leaves because she refuses to marry a non-Jew. He subsequently marries her sister Madeleine, who has no such qualms. When Madeleine gives birth to a boy, Peter must decide whether or not to circumcise his son. He ultimately chooses to have the newborn boy circumcised in the hospital. The procedure is clinical and devoid of ceremony, but Peter's decision to physically identify his son as a Jew weighs heavily on his mind. Later, confronted by the visual reminder of his past, Peter considers laser surgery to remove the number tattooed on his left arm. Uncontrollable flashbacks to events from the war and conversations with his father's ghost provide glimpses into Peter's troubled mind and his increasingly unstable psychological state. When delving into this horrifying struggle, Feldman's writing is most compelling.

When Peter discovers a copy of Anne's recently-published diary on his wife's bedside table, and a well-publicized play and movie based on the diary follow shortly, his greatest challenge unfolds. The sudden pervasiveness

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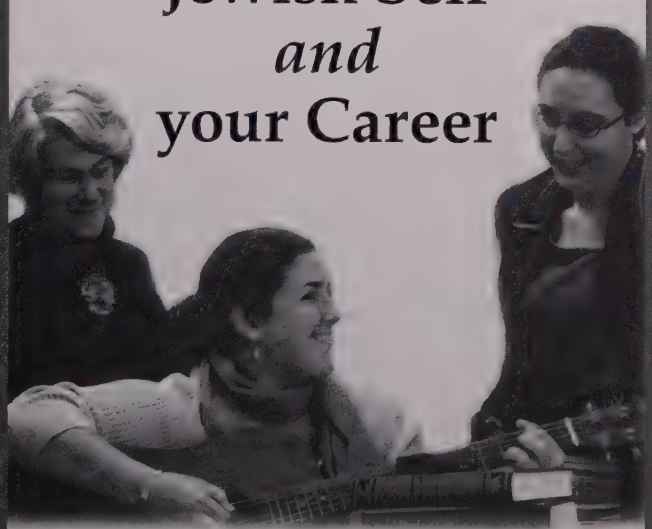

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of Anne's words in the culture around him forces Peter to grapple again with his experience in the Secret Annex. Peter is shocked that Americans could claim to "know" the Holocaust after reading one book or sitting through a movie. Feldman suggests that this history is too complex for such a limited vision. Anne's is but one story of the Holocaust, although it is a good place to start. Whether or not Peter will share his own story is the question that ultimately drives this book.

With the memory of his past intensified by the diary's appearance, Peter finally confronts his Judaism and visits a synagogue. Here he encounters his foil: a Holocaust survivor who actively practices his religion and finds strength in the Jewish community. This survivor gently explains to Peter, "In Hebrew, you don't pray *I*, you pray *we*....So, you pray we, it means you're not alone." Madeleine and Susannah, Peter's wife and sister-in-law, form a similar dichotomous pair. Whereas Susannah discovers newfound importance in her Jewish community, Madeleine claims that the Holocaust led her to atheism. Feldman rightly raises the difficult issue of how the Holocaust both created and destroyed Jewish identities, and she reminds us to question how the Holocaust continues to shape the identities of Jews today.

—Natalie Graham

Preparation for Prayer

Occasionally, a first book of poetry comes out which offers a sensibility and vision that are entirely unprecedented. **Eve Grubin**'s debut collection of poems, *Morning Prayer* (Sheep Meadow Press, 2005, $12.95), is that kind of momentous book. Grubin, an observant Jew, is currently a fellow at New York's Drisha Institute for Jewish Education. Her poems read like prayers, or "the preparation for prayer," as she says in the first line of her title poem, which then goes on to define the essence of prayer: "Less the body, than voice, breath, gaze. // It's not faith, it's faltering."

Grubin's poems return to that faltering often, and it is what makes her work so complex and compelling. Her poems don't describe spiritual yearning so much as wrestle with the desire to reach a state of yearning. For every declaration or image in her poems, she poses a question, sometimes several. In "Wild," she tells that "The rabbi said to me: 'You be the wild one,'" to which Grubin responds, "What is a wild woman? If you shave/ your head, are you wild? Is rebellion wild?" The way the questions spiral invites the reader to return and read each line again—always a sign of a great poem.

Seasoned poet **Jane Hirshfield**'s new collection *After* (Harper Collins, 2006, $23.95) also addresses spirituality, though from a perspective more Zen than Jewish. As in her previous five books, Hirshfield combines meditation with vivid imagery, nimbly working the two together to convey complicated emotions with refreshing clar-

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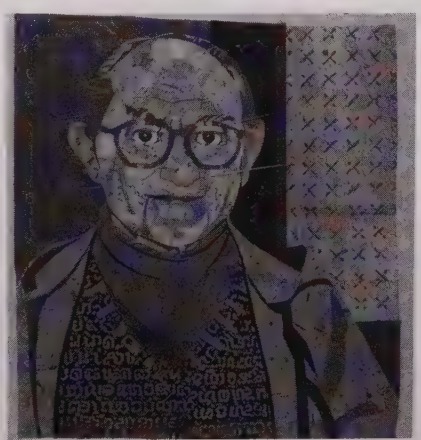

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ity. In "Burlap Sack," she writes, "A person is full of sorrow/ the way a burlap sack is full of stones or sand./ We say, 'Hand me the sack,'/ but we get the weight." Here, as in other poems, Hirshfield uses the physical to address the metaphysical, which in this poem—and in most of the collection—revolves around an exploration of sorrow.

Some moments in the book are more playful and irreverent, like the ending of the affecting poem "Study of Melon & Insect." Here, Hirshfield compares the misshapen melon and insect featured in the painting to the two halves "of a long and unlikely marriage met on a park bench—// *Six decades, and still I sometimes find him a stranger*/ the old woman pretends to complain." Unexpected turns like these in Hirshfield's poems, coupled with her deft way of juxtaposing imagery and meditation, are what have made her such a prominent and enduring figure in contemporary American poetry.

Another well-known poet, **Maxine Kumin**, recently published her fifteenth book, *Jack and Other New Poems* (Norton, 2005, $23.95), at the age of 80. This new collection returns to familiar territory, with poems about Kumin's New Hampshire horse farm interspersed with poems reflecting on social causes. Of the overtly political poems, the most vivid are those written as dramatic monologues, which seem to take their subjects further than those written from Kumin's own point of view. This is particularly true of "The Rapist Speaks: A Prison Interview," one of the most chilling poems in the book, which ends abruptly: "Got enough? Take your notes and go home."

As in earlier books, Kumin's poems about the ethical decisions involved in farm life are made larger by their juxtaposition with poems on larger social realities. At certain moments in the collection, these two veins of writing

Reviewers

Gabrielle Birkner is a writer in New York City.

Susan Dworkin is a novelist, teacher and playwright and the author, with Edith Hahn Beer, of *The Nazi Officer's Wife*.

Shala Erlich, M.D., is teaching pathophysiology to nurse practitioner students.

Natalie Graham lives in New York City, where she works in publishing and volunteers at Housing Works Used Book Café.

Tammy Hepps is a software developer living in New York.

Ilana Kurshan works as a literary agent and freelance editor in Jerusalem.

Sara J. Marks lives in New York City, where she works in city government.

Idra Novey's chapbook of poems *The Next Country* was published by the Poetry Society of America in 2005. She teaches writing at Columbia University.

Susan Sapiro, a former Lilith intern and former Senior Associate at Ma'yan: The Jewish Women's Project, is currently an Associate at DRG–The Development Resource Group.

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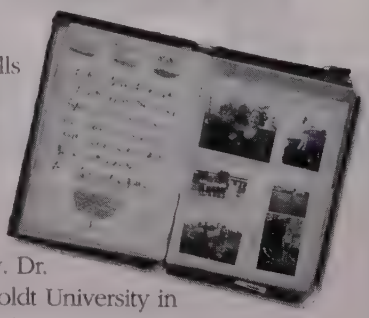

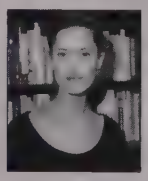

Leading the tour is acclaimed scholar Dr. Sonat Hart, Assistant Professor of History at Baltimore Hebrew University. Dr. Hart received a fellowship from Humboldt University in Berlin, where she is establishing a Jewish studies department.

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come together, as in "Women and Horses," which begins with an epigraph from Theodor Adorno, "After Auschwitz, to write a poem is barbaric," and ends with Kumin's call to "see life again, nevertheless, in the words of Isaac Babel,/ *as a meadow over which women and horses wander.*"

—Idra Novey

In Heathcliff's Footsteps

Tamar Yellin comes from England's North Country, where Heathcliff, the sad hero of Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, haunts the desolate moors. Her evocative, beautifully written collection, *Kafka in Bronteland and Other Stories* (The Toby Press, 2006, $14.95) describes some of the Kafka-like souls who live in this overcast landscape, exiled from their true selves, imprisoned by torpor and confusion. At its heart, these stories, set in a place where it is not always easy to be a Jew, aim to capture the trials of living in exile. The narrator of the title story, watching the local Muslim kids go off to Koran school, remembers tales of how Jews used to live, and, having missed a sense of Jewish community in her own life, is "filled with nostalgia for something I never had."

In "Return to Zion," a father named Odysseus prepares all his life for a great journey back to the Holy Land. But his journey is as mythic as his name. "This is a true story," Yellin reminds us at the end. Of course we know that. We have all known people – and not all of them are Jews – who never succeed in journeying to their Promised Land.

This theme of prolonged alienation, thwarted hopes, and missed chances turns up throughout the collection: In the aging daughter who sleeps chastely in her mother's bed; the mistress who shows off the jewels her lover has given her but never gets the one gold ring she really wants; and the abandoned father longing for his Italian son.

Some of the stories have the feel of character sketches: highly personal, perhaps autobiographical, preliminary drawings for novels yet to come. The author actually seems to acknowledge this in *A New Story for Nada*, where she admits that she may have reached a stage for new passions.

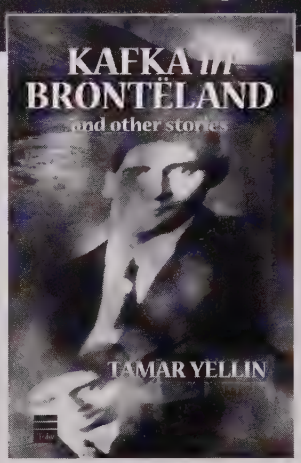
"Moonlight" is the most compelling tale in the collection. Here, an art critic builds a brilliant career by studying a certain Victorian painter, a man mad for moonlight, "for lanes and lakes, beaches and bridges, ships and mansions." The artist has collected skulls, crystals, peacock feathers. The delights of his gifted eye became with time like objects in a still life, symbols of death. One modern collector eventually burns his now un-sellable paintings. But then the critic-narrator resurrects the painter's reputation and enriches his own:

I do not tell them the real reason why I seek out his work. Why I will travel miles...merely to obtain a glimpse of something I have...seen before. I re-enter the labyrinth; once more I am standing in the moonlight of his endless dream. I am as lost as he is. And it fills me with wonder that failure can be so beautiful.

In this one paragraph, all the lonely, bitter, alienated people who roam in Heathcliff's footsteps are made splendid. The "endless dream" of the return to Zion is re-awakened. Exile becomes sustaining.

It is no small accomplishment that the further away from her personal narrative Yellin has journeyed, the closer she has come to writing the truth of all of our hearts. ●

—Susan Dworkin



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kohenet.org

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Sisters of the Red Tent. Marcia Falk, Melissa Weintraub, Latifa Berry Kropf, Rabbi Lynne Gotlieb, and the Kohenet training (above) are teaching at the Elat Chayyim women's summer retreat, same dates, August 14-20 during it's last summer in Accord, NY, before the center relocates. Lilith magazine is co-sponsoring this terrific retreat.
jewishretreatcenter.org

Women of the Storm. National Council of Jewish Women joins a group of New Orleans advocates calling themselves Women of the Storm to urge representatives and senators to see for themselves the devastation caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. If you live in the U.S., urge your members of Congress to visit New Orleans to learn about the complexities of recovery efforts.
action.ncjw.org/campaign/new_orleans_wmn_of_storm

Surrounded by Family and Friends, about ending life in a hospice, is a series of flat-quilted fabric artworks by Deirdre Scherer appearing in a one-hour film-in-progress by Camilla Rockwell. The film also features the music of Hallowell, a group of hospice singers. The film can help initiates a discussion about dying and death.
Dscherer.com

For Bereaved Mothers and Widows. Suddenly losing a beloved child or husband is overwhelming, and dealing with the grief and the changed family is traumatic. The parents of Koby Mandell, a 13-year-old American-Israeli who was killed by terrorists in 2001, have transformed their pain into a source of healing for others. Their Mothers' Healing Retreats bring together women whose husbands or children have been killed in terrorist attacks, to nurture them physically, emotionally, and spiritually.
Kobymandell.org

White Ink. Some section headings for an upcoming anthology of poetry on motherhood: When Water Breaks, The Birth of the Mother, Apron Strings: Motherhood as Institution, Cutting the Cord: Mothers in Violent Times. Want to be included? Send your poem by September 1, 2006, to: Association for Research on Mothering (ARM), 726 Atkinson, York University, 4700 Keele St., Toronto, ON M3J 1P3, Canada; (416) 736-2100 x 60366; *arm@yorku.ca*

Getting Even: Women's Tales of Revenge, an anthology being edited by Mitzi Szereto, asks "what if for once the 'unfair sex' (and even some of our own) actually got what's coming to them? Lover, husband, husband's bit-on-the-side, boss, child minder, neighbor, loan officer, auto mechanic, milkman, whomever. Ladies, it's time to settle the score! Who says revenge ain't sweet?" Send your unpublished story, no more than 9,000 words, by postal mail no later than August 1, 2006. Inquire at:
worddabbler@yahoo.com

How did Pharoah's daughter and the Jewish girl Miriam collude to rescue baby Moses? *Pharoah's Daughter and Miriam Save Moses: The Value of Life*, is a comic book teaching tool based on the Biblical book of Exodus, a "Manga" midrash created by Gila Gevirtz, in the style of these popular Japanese graphic novels.
behrmanhouse.com

The National Conference on Health and Domestic Violence will be held in San Francisco on March 22-24, 2007. You may submit ideas for workshops until July 28, 2006.
endabuse.org

1-888-2-LILITH

Words of comfort you need if you're a caregiver—"a time often filled with upheaval and isolation, financial challenge and frustration, stressful decisions and sadness"—are offered in an inspiring spiritual companion for caregivers by Rabbi Stephanie Dickstein. *With Sweetness from the Rock* is a 50-page booklet from the National and New York Center for Jewish Healing, the Rita J. Kaplan Jewish Connections Program, and the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services.
ncjh.org

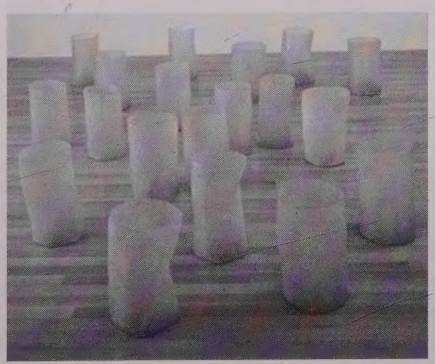
Take back the news. Since sexual assault is too often misrepresented—and sometimes even ignored—in the media, here's a chance for rape survivors to publish their stories in their own words. You can learn how to organize a Take Back the News Community Print Project at *takebackthenews.org.*

Sacred Aging. *To Honor and Respect, a Program and Resource Guide for Congregations on Sacred Aging* by Richard F. Address with Andrew L. Rosenkranz, takes a sympathetic and frank look at the evolving revolution in longevity and how it affects our Jewish communal lives. It considers issues such as co-habitation, spiritual legacies, and autobiographical programs.
urj.org

An unusual tool to combat sex abuse. *The Jewish Self: Sexual Education for Life,* is a remarkable manual to help prevent of sexual abuse—in keeping with a traditional *haskhafa* or Torah perspective—to a vulnerable population of children and young adults who lack language skills, social awareness and the general knowledge necessary to protect themselves. Created by Rabbi Gil Elmaleh with a foreword by Laurette Rothwachs, both of the Sinai Special Needs Institute in Teaneck NJ.
SinaiInstitute.org

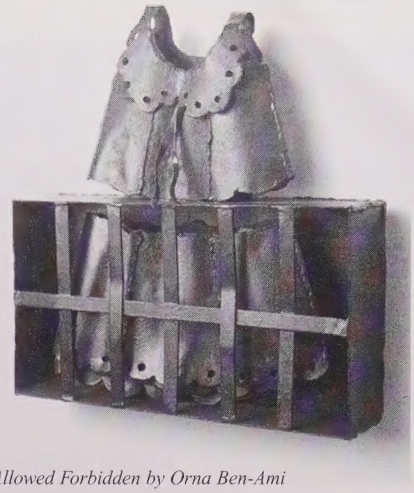
Can You Hear Me? Israeli and Palestinian Women Fight for Peace. A film produced, written and directed by Lilly Rivlin, narrated by Debra Winger, will premier at the Jerusalem International Film Festival in July. Though the prospects for peace have ebbed and flowed over the years, these women activists, have persisted as has this fimmaker, whose orignal title for this film project was Sarah and Hagar.
LillyRivlin.com

Encounter Point a 90-minute documentary film, follows a former Israeli settler, a Palestinian ex-prisoner, a bereaved Israeli mother and a wounded Palestinian bereaved brother who risk their lives and public standing to promote a nonviolent end to the conflict. Encounter Point's Israeli/Palestinian/North American/Brazilian production team of young women includes: director Ronit Avni, co-director Julia Bacha, producers Nahanni Rous and Joline Makhlouf, the first Palestinian female pilot.
encounterpoint.com



Repetition Nineteen III, 1968 by Eva Hesse

Eva Hesse took the art world by storm and died at age 33 in 1970. Her minimalist and postminimalist sculptpures are featured in an exhibit at the Jewish Museum in New York, through September 17. *jewishmuseum.org*



Allowed Forbidden by Orna Ben-Ami

Aishet Chail by Saara Gallin

Feminine Principals: Works in Iron, Fiber and Glass features three Jewish feminist sculptors each in a powerful solo show, side by side in one gallery. Tel Aviv-based Orna Ben-Ami works in iron, transforming this tough material into objects of grace and softness—a baby's dress (above), a ballet toe shoe that indents a steel beam, a suitcase with roots growing out of it. Boston- based Georgette Benisty, born in Casablanca, works in exotic fabric, with touches of paint and collage to create figures that reflect her Morrocan past, and French culture. Westchester-based Saara Gallin, a glass sculptor, creates abstract reliefs incorporating ceremonial motifs. At Yeshiva University Museum through January 2007.
yumuseum.org

—compiled by Naomi Danis

A WOMAN OF UNCERTAIN CHARACTER

THE AMOROUS AND RADICAL ADVENTURES OF MY MOTHER JENNIE

(WHO ALWAYS WANTED TO BE A RESPECTABLE JEWISH MOM)

BY HER BASTARD SON

by Clancy Sigal

A hard sleety snow buffeted the four of us as we trudged up a slushy sidewalk in the Detroit suburb of Royal Oak, Michigan. We—that is, Jennie, my fellow Rocket Nate Manoff in a Sad Sackish 85th Division private's uniform, his girlfriend Louise, and me in my George Raft velvet collar topcoat—(I was awaiting draft papers)—approached the only house on the block without Yule trimmings, a plain wood two-story with a snowed-in front porch. In a small nervous voice Louise whispered, "There's my dad. Oh, God help me."

Jennie Persily

Royal Oak was the home of America's most notorious anti-Semite, the radio priest, Father Coughlin, who'd been so wildly popular that the Pope himself had to slap a lock on his mouth. By some wretched coincidence Nate, on his last furlough before shipping overseas, had met Louise Whittacre, daughter of a Ford foreman and a Christian Fronter from Royal Oak, at a serviceman's canteen in Detroit. Nate, with his large nose, small stature, and hunched shoulders, looked unmistakably like some bigot's idea of a Jew, while Louise, with her uptilted prom-queen nose and long dark straight hair, was Miss Gentile America. Both sets of parents—Jewish and anti-Jewish—freaked out beyond reason on learning of the liaison. The young unnerved couple had begged my mother to intervene and use her negotiating skill to save them from the wrath of their rampaging hormones.

Louise's father, Mr. Whittacre—it had to be him—stood on his porch in blue overalls holding a short-barrel 12-gauge shotgun on us. He leveled the gun and yelled, "Go back where you came from—and take that Jewish-loving whore with you!" He meant his only daughter Louise. Except for us, leaning into the driving snow, the street was deserted. I liked the formality of his "Jewish," not kike, sheenie, or Hebe.

How has it come to this? Nate is nineteen, she is seventeen. He has a three-day pass from nearby Camp Custer, she is serving doughnuts to the GIs, and somehow in the jam-packed city they find a motel room for the night. Nate goes on to Chicago where his mother screams bloody murder when she finds in his pants pocket the motel bill for "Mr. & Mrs. Nathan Manoff." Nate makes the mistake of his life by confessing all to his mom which brings on a threat—not to be taken altogether lightly on the west side—of suicide; Mrs. Manoff, devoutly Orthodox, phones the Whittacres in Detroit, Mr. Whittacre locks Louise in her room, Louise escapes out a back window to plead with Nate to rescue her; Nate panics and calls in my mother, who grabs a train for Detroit in the middle of a wartime winter. Now watch:

With a sawed-off aimed squarely at us, Louise begins shaking uncontrollably, trying to wriggle free of Jennie's iron grip

continued on page 27

Bring in the Show

Celebrating nearly 30 years of charting Jewish women's lives with exuberance, rigor, clairvoyance, subversion, and tenderness, Lilith has created a stunning exhibition featuring some of the freshest ideas and the germinal writers and authors this magazine has published.

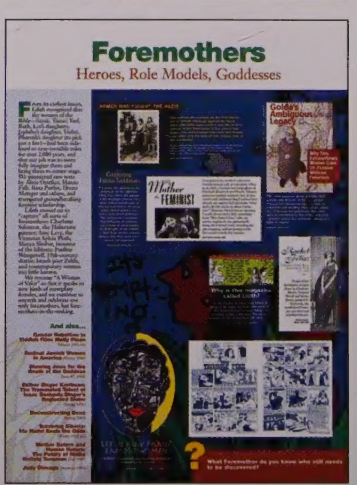
You know that Lilith brings new ideas and interpretations of the *zeitgeist* before they become cover stories in other news magazines: "J.A.P.-baiting" on college campuses; Jewish women's eggs for test-tube babies; "forgotten" women writers; the misconduct of rabbis; the pleasures of women's philanthropy; navigating interfaith families; and much, much more.

Bringing the magazine's issues right to your neighborhood, Lilith has created a stunning, stimulating and entirely delightful exhibition highlighting the signature subjects the magazine has explored.

In 10 lively and revealing wall panels, the exhibition explores women's dramatic new roles in Jewish ritual and as rabbis and cantors, the changing face of Jewish organizations, intimate relationships, new feminist scholarship, and more. The exhibition is complete with gorgeous illustrations and covers from the magazine.

Lilith Magazine: The Voice of Jewish Women has played to crowds in New York, Washington, Boca Raton, Cincinnati, and plenty of places in between. Soon it'll be in Winnipeg, Canada.

To bring the exhibition to your community, campus or JCC, and to find out how Lilith will help you create local programs to complement the show, email SusanWS@Lilith.org or call 1-888-2-LILITH. To see more samples of the wonderful wall panels that are part of this exhibition, visit www.Lilith.org.



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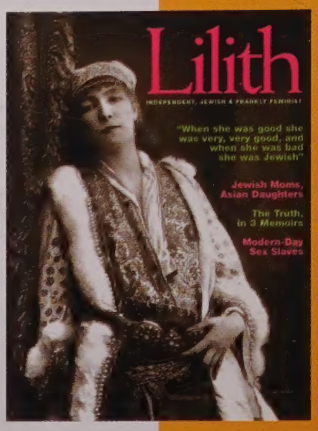
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